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CONFIDENCES.

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RITA."

"Homo sum ; humani nihil a me alienum puto."—TERENCE.

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CONFIDENCES.

*From the REV. HERBERT ESDAILE to his Sister, the
BARONESS SCHÖNBOEN, at Dresden.*

I.

ASHFORD, June 1, 1858.

I sit down, dear Mary, to begin a careful transcript of my life here written at odd intervals for my pleasure and your edification. We are so far apart now that it is impossible to send you a letter every other day, as I used when I was at College and you were at home. I shall congest half-a-dozen together, therefore, periodically. Horace has an oft-repeated line to the effect that those who cross the seas change their climate, but not their mind. I know it is so with you, Mary. Now that only we two are left in the world of the old home-circle, I want to bring you as near me in spirit as possible. I am as yet a stranger in the land here, and feel

at times the want of a friend to whom I can open my heart. I will do so to you. A man ought not to want sympathy, I suppose, but go straight to his mark, without caring whether his motives are understood or no. Well, remember I am but three-and-twenty, and my college life was altogether too prosperous and happy to counteract the defects of my natural temperament, and of my home education. I have been a spoilt boy hitherto. At Baliol I had two or three most intimate friends, who took up where you left off, so to speak, in making my life pleasant and smooth. Then, thanks to our dear father's training, I passed my "great go" rather triumphantly, so that until I came to Ashford, I had hardly had a rub or knock in this battle of life. But I know that this is not intended for anyone, and ought not to last. A curate's life in a large parish is not a bed of roses, though you must not imagine from this that I find my lot a very hard one: on the contrary.

I have been at Ashford three weeks. Certainly neither Goldsmith nor any other painter (by prescriptive right) of an English village, ever conceived a lovelier spot. During my two months'

tour abroad, I saw nothing that would be so constantly pleasant to English eyes as the scenery about here ; richly wooded and watered as it is, and wearing an aspect of health, peace, and plenty. The village lies at the foot of a short hill, up which the road winds, skirted on one side by the woods of Castle Ashford, and on the other by detached cottages, the last stragglers of the main street. Each of these is fronted by a strip of garden, in cultivating which the possessors seem to emulate each other. Sir Richard, I am told, encourages this taste among his tenants ; and nowhere have I seen such hollyhocks and sweet peas as light up the roadside here. My interest was at once awakened in the occupants of these sunny little dwellings, and I have not been disappointed in finding them all industrious, well-conducted families.

Mounting a few hundred yards higher to the brow of the hill, on looking back one sees the slender spire of our church rising amidst the red roofs and blue smoke of the village, backed by four yew trees, whose swarthy solemn boughs overshadow a great part of the small churchyard. Beyond this the eye travels over a wide tract ;

following the river that winds, like a silver riband with its fringe of sedgy banks, among the June-meadows—now gleaming, now hid again; till in the far distance, between the pollards, one narrow strip catches the clear sky for an instant and is lost for ever: then past farm-houses and green corn-fields to a range of soft undulating hills, not sharply cut against the sky, but melting with the blue mist, and lit here and there by the white scar of a chalk quarry.

Further to the right, among those chesnut woods, you may descry the grey tower of Stapylton Hall; and beyond that again, higher up, the Grecian portico of Mr. Forsepp's (the scissors manufacturer's) great white mansion, swelling with importance, on a sloping ground from which every stick has been cut away, lest the eye should overlook it in the landscape. In spite of this blot it is a lovely rich English view; worthy, I might say in conventional phrase, of the pencil of Claude, —who would have put a Roman galley on the river, by the bye, and made Fawns dance under Mr. Forsepp's portico—but you and I agreed in our walks through the Dresden gallery that this compliment to nature is a

doubtful one, at best. So having taken you to the top of our hill and shown you the notable features therefrom, I must now walk you down again and introduce you to my humble dwelling.

It is over the chemist's shop, in the main street of Ashford. Opposite is Mrs. Jones's universal warehouse, or "emporium" as she styles it: resembling a Turkish bazaar in its assemblage of incongruous merchandise. Here haberdashery and muslin-*flashery* decoy your sex by the alluring signals they hang out. A man's hat, marked 4s. 9d., swings from a sort of gibbet near the door, and a pair of trousers made to suit any emergency of shape, keep it company. Here, too, I purchased my tea and sugar (very bad they are), and was presented with a paper which informed me that Mrs. Jones dealt no less in Guinness's stout, Rowland's Odonto, boots and brushes, etc., etc., besides "a select assortment of articles direct from Paris."

Had I time or inclination, there^d could not be a finer post for studying the characters and customs of my female parishioners than my own window. Whenever I leave the house I am sure to see one of them hovering on the confines of the

opposite door, and generally in the afternoon there are a succession of pony carriages stationary there. The universality of Mrs. Jones's enterprises, and there being so few shops here, makes her's the centre of attraction, I am told, to a very large neighbourhood. A few yards higher up stands the church, opposite the village green, where those rival houses, the Sun and Ashford Arms, face each other like two angry combatants, waving their shields truculently before them. And there stands the House of Peace, like a grand calm judge above these and all other vain and vexed differences in our community. Those who troubled it in other days, who sparred and wrangled as these do now, sleep around under the grey and mossy stones and in the shadow of those four great yews. How many more generations shall go by and find us still far removed from Christian fellowship, toleration, and good will?

The church has lately had a new Gothic frontage, porch, and steeple, and this has rather an incongruous effect with the old building, which is of a very debased period of architecture; nothing but one window being left of the

original Saxon church. The architect's plans for remodelling the whole, when it was found necessary to enlarge it a year or two ago, were rejected as being too expensive: yet this is a wealthy neighbourhood. Can the owners of these great houses think the money spent on God's House thrown away? But even more than for its unsightly exterior, are they to be blamed for insisting on the continuance of that absurd arrangement of huge family pews, like islands, curtained off from the congregational ocean,—a remnant of feudal barbarism I had hoped was obsolete. After this it is almost superfluous to say that the organ is broken-winded, the choir deplorable, and that the clerk responds through his nose. But I shall say no more on this subject for the present.

Along one side of the churchyard runs a green lane, debutting from the main street, and about five hundred yards down it stands the Rectory. To judge from its appearance, it is about a century old, very ugly, but comfortable-looking; of a dark purplish brick, with thick white sashes and divisions to the windows, which are cut up into very small panes. This seems a trivial par-

ticular, but it gives you a better notion of the house in which, of course, a good deal of my time is spent, than if I were to describe its carpets and curtains.

In a narrow study, close to the hall door, sits the Rector during the greater part of the day. The drawing-room is never used but for the reception of a morning visitor; the symmetry of its annuals and china baskets is seldom disturbed. When I dine there, Mr. Brigstock and I sit in the dining-room after dinner, while Mrs. Brigstock retires to her nursery, where she spends all her time. I suppose the Rector occasionally intrudes into that department, otherwise he can see very little of his wife. How shall I describe him, to you who believe that "the physical is always an index to the moral nature of a man?" Picture to yourself an unusually tall one, broad, yet not impressing you with an idea of strength. Why, I cannot tell, but he looks as if he had *sat away* all his muscular energy: no free play about the limbs; the hands, especially, having a dry, incapable look. His head, at the first glance, will strike you as a fine one. It is rather bald, but a few grey

and sandy locks yet remain : the skull rises at that point where you phrenologists place benevolence, and yet higher to where I believe firmness (obstinacy?) and self-esteem lie, when it makes an abrupt descent backwards. The brow is high, straight and narrow ; the eyes small and grey ; the upper lip of inordinate length ; the mouth well-shaped. Altogether, the face is comely for a man of fifty, but spoiled by an irritable redness of surface : it looks as though he had washed it with a nail-brush. Scrupulously clean in his person, of a remarkable sonorous voice, and a clerical dignity, not to say pomp of manner, to which, I fear, *I* shall never attain ;—these are his chief characteristics, at first sight. What do you make of them ? Listen.

Mr. Brigstock is a good man ; by which I mean that he is thoroughly conscientious, acts up to what *he* considers his duty, is just, where his prejudices do not interfere, and even generous. Unfortunately, his ideas move in the very narrowest groove : he would have been an intolerant Puritan or a bigoted Romanist had circumstances permitted : he has no leniency to difference of opinion, no sympathy of a large kind with human

doubts and difficulties. This, together with a harshness towards every moral delinquency, prevents his having as much influence as he might have in his large parish, where Dissent has made great progress of late. In spite of his encouragement of virtue, and his own charities and blameless life, the very best of his parishioners, I believe, would as soon think of opening their hearts to him, as of asking him to share their dinner.

And, I must confess, I feel like them. So few ideas have we in common, upon any subject, that I seldom advance an opinion in his company, and never dare trust myself to differ from his. I cannot tell where it would stop, and, in our respective positions, the less argumentative we are the better. Moreover, it is folly to argue without a remote hope of bringing your antagonist nearer to you, sooner or later. So we discuss nothing but the Indian news, and the crops ; and I listen silently while Mr. Brigstock enlightens me as to the state of his parish, and denounces Hobbins, the drunken tinker.

Mrs. Brigstock can only be described in a negative way. She is neither fat nor thin, plain

nor pretty, old, young, clever, dull, nor different in any respect from the women one meets every day, and forgets at once. The only positive thing about her is that she has six children, and—only that I know it is a natural impossibility—I should say they were all of the same age. She is entirely absorbed in their feeding, clothing, and teething. All the time she is talking, one has an uncomfortable conviction that her thoughts are in the nursery: and like Thea, there is “a listening fear in her regard” when any sound penetrates from that region.

June 10.—I have dined with the Rector and his wife alone two or three times: but he said to me last Saturday,

“I have asked two or three of our neighbours to come and dine with us to-morrow, Mr. Esdaile: you will favour me with your company at seven? I shall be happy of the opportunity to introduce you to some of my parishioners of the upper class, as I have already done among the lower orders. Admiral Montacute expressed himself very favourably as to your delivery: you will meet him and his daughters. Also Mrs. Halliday—the lady in the green bonnet who sits

immediately underneath the reading-desk—and her eldest daughter, a very right-minded young woman. Colonel Shaddock we also expect—a distinguished Indian and Peninsular officer.”

“He was good enough to leave a card on me. Several gentlemen have called, indeed, but I have not made their personal acquaintance. Does the Colonel live here?”

“Yes; in that white house at the end of the village, with a large garden. Like Cincinnatus, he has turned his sword into a ploughshare, and is an active Magistrate and one of our Poor-law Guardians. A most exemplary man: a constant attendant at divine service, Mr. Esdaile.”

“Whose is the little cottage, by-the-bye, beyond the Colonel’s? the one with the creeper over it. Twice when I have passed it in the very early morning I have observed a remarkable looking man walking in the garden, reading.”

“Ah!” groaned the Rector, “that is Humboldt Ferrers, the author. Alas, Mr. Esdaile, a lost sheep!”

“You surprise me! How little one can judge of a man by his books. They breathe such a truly Christian spirit that I have always thought

I should like to know the man who wrote them."

"An Unitarian, sir: where that is the case all must be hollow. I am unaware that there is anything against his *moral* character. I believe he pays his bills here very regularly and so on, but—ah!—in short, you understand."

"Oh! of course, Mr. Brigstock. I suppose this is the person of whom the poor Irishwoman spoke yesterday. She called him Mr. Fars, and said he had saved her husband from jail, by paying the heavy fine the magistrates had imposed on him for being drunk and creating a disturbance."

"The man is a most wretched character, besides being a Papist. Quite an unworthy object for charity. A month's hard work in jail without drink, would have been of more benefit to him than this ill-timed bounty: but 'tis thus a blind philanthropy ever acts, Mr. Esdaile."

I was more provoked to an answer than usual, because I felt that, in the main, Mr. Brigstock was right. But some people have an unfortunate way of presenting the wisest principle, so that it looks ugly and uncharitable.

We sat down, ten, at the Rectory table, on Tuesday ; Mr. Jack Stapylton, the squire's second son, and Miss Tarragon, a spinster lady of great weight in the village, being added to the party named. At dinner, I was between Miss Halliday and Miss Montacute. Stapylton kept up a brisk conversation on the other side of the latter lady : they evidently know each other intimately,—probably from childhood. I gathered that he had been absent from home. He had evidently some good stories to tell, and his conversation was of that familiar nature, interspersed with jokes and allusions, that I should not have understood if I had heard every word. Till the end of the second course, therefore, I only knew that Miss Montacute had a fine clear profile and a brown skin, and that she wore a white dress with coral beads round her neck.

The other young lady and I kept up a pretty animated conversation. I have no idea what age she is ; but (through negligence or intention), she makes herself look much older than she need, by—what shall I call it?—the *widowed-matronliness* of her attire. A dark

grey silk, a black cross, and a lace shawl huddled about her, looked as out of season with the bright auburn hair, as they did with the June sun that streamed through the window on her head.

“How do you like what you have seen of Ashford, Mr. Esdaile? Pretty, isn’t it? Perhaps all places are alike to you, though. In your important calling, such trivial temporal considerations are of little moment, naturally.”

“Not at all; I assure you. I am much influenced by locality, and, judging by myself, I believe the inhabitants are always more or less affected by it.”

“Ah! yes, you mean as regards health. But in a spiritual point of view, you don’t think it influences the character?”

“Undoubtedly. Have not the Tyrolese in their mountain fastnesses, and the Dutch among their canals, all the characteristics of the lands they inhabit? In a lesser degree, look at the difference between a Devonshire and a Yorkshire labourer. It would be ungrateful to this clear bracing air, and to the beautiful position of Ashford, if I said I would as soon be in a Lincolnshire fen, or be a curate in the City.”

“And yet, as Mr. Priestly says (you admire his books, I’m sure—charming, ain’t they?) surely, for a man, there is nothing like that rushing tide of life in the capital!”

“It depends on whether one is a good swimmer.”

“Such a much wider field of action! For my part, I always long to join some of those earnest female labourers in London.”

“Really! I should have thought you might have found enough work even in this small community of fifteen hundred souls.”

“Perhaps, if I might do as I liked: but mamma’s ideas and mine don’t agree. I can’t go about at night as I should wish, and reclaim wanderers in the public-houses, and so on. There is so much conventionality about these things, isn’t there, Mr. Esdaile? Our sphere of action is so very limited. I am sure you agree with Priestly that we all *ought* to work?”

“Yes; though not quite in the way that clever author would have us.”

“How so?”

“I see in God’s order of creation that to

every living thing is allotted its *own* work. There are thrushes and nightingales as well as barn-door fowls, thank goodness! There are lilies in the field as well as potatoes, and the beasts there are not all horses and oxen. Besides the pot and the plough, there is the high spiritual delight in God's beautiful works, which I take to be fully as beneficial to us, Miss Halliday."

"I do not quite see . . . You would not encourage anyone to be idle, Mr. Esdaile? You don't mean that?"

"By all means, no. Only I think it absurd to expect every one to work in the same way. The same means, the same field, are not open to all. There is a vast deal of cant about this word 'work.' The poet and the novelist, in their chimney-corners, pen in hand, may do far wider and more lasting benefit than if, in a paroxysm of enthusiasm, they rushed into St. Giles's distributing Bibles, or turned scavengers, as Mr. Priestley seems to recommend. There is his mistake. He has but one *beau ideal* of excellence for all manners of men."

"I see what you mean, Mr. Esdaile; but, as

regards myself (we had become quite intimate by this time), mamma is always wanting me to go into the world, and I'm so tired of it. It was all very well when I first came out, but it seems so empty now. It can give *me* nothing in *return*: there is nothing real or true about it. I should like to be a *sœur de charité*, so as to escape it all."

I glanced over at her mamma in a helmet of roses, and thought *she* looked anything but tired. An insipid restlessness possessed the features: the daughter had far more of matronly repose; and I could not help wondering at the relationship.

"The world can give you nothing in return, as you say, Miss Halliday: but if you'll allow me to point out the moral of what I said just now; it is to accept the ground and the tools God gives you, and make the most of them. To further His Word,—to be an industrious citizen for the good of your fellows in the country highways, or the crowded streets, in the closet, or the cottage, or the ball-room. I don't believe there is any position in which you may not do good, if you set about it *judiciously*. That isn't by preaching, understand me."

“Yes: but mamma’s opinions and mine are very different on these subjects; and as I cannot make her see the necessity of my devoting myself to good works, I have sometimes thought of joining Miss Spark’s sisterhood, Mr. Esdaile.”

“And you think *anything* could justify your deserting a mother? however different her views may be from yours. This is one of the saddest things in the Romish Church, to my mind: the inculcation of that refined selfishness they call a ‘vocation;’ to leave the sweet home-charities and duties of domestic life, and build up, as they think, a narrow staircase for themselves to Heaven. Much good may it do them!”

I was rather heated, I suppose, for Miss Halliday rejoined, in a low voice,

“Mamma would still have Clemmy, my sister, who is much more suited to her in every way. However, of course you won’t mention what I just said. I look on you already as my father-confessor, you see, Mr. Esdaile” (this with a winning smile). “Good Mr. Brigstock never is anyone’s, of course.”

“I have not seen your sister yet, Miss Halliday,” said I, anxious to change the channel

of conversation. "Is she coming here this evening?"

"No; she is in London for the season, with the Ashfords, enjoying all its frivolities, poor dear, as is natural at her age. Ah! it will not last *long*!"

"The season, I believe, is nearly over," I rejoined, with a smile. "But then, I suppose, fashionable people, like the Ashfords, bring London down to them in the country."

"Yes! that is the worst of it. There is an endless round of gaiety at the Castle, and Mamma always wants me to go there. The Ashfords are very kind, but so frivolous: they don't suit me. They are Clemmy's friends."

"Of what does the family consist?"

"There is Sir Richard and Lady Caroline, and a son and daughter. The son is in the Guards, and Blanche is a London beauty. They are the regular sort of London fashionable——"

Here the sound of something falling overhead interrupted Miss Halliday, and shook down a piece of plaster from the ceiling upon her mamma's helmet of roses.

“Dear me! what is this? How very odd,” said that lady.

“I’m afraid,” cries Mrs. Brigstock, cutting into an anecdote of the Admiral’s about Badajoz, and looking over her boiled fowls at the Rector, “I’m afraid, papa, that Mary Jane has been and upset the washing-stand and bath again.”

Every one glanced up, nervously, expecting to see the water oozing down on us. The Rector alone paid no attention, but went on discoursing solemnly with Miss Tarragon, until his wife cried out once more, as a distant roar reached us, “Perhaps I’d better run up and see whether Tommy has fallen on his head again?”

“What does it signify if he has?” said Miss Tarragon, like an exasperated terrier at being deprived of its rat, for she was deep in poor-laws at that moment.

The Rector, in his most rectorial manner, added, “The child will do very well without you, my love.”

“If *I* had a child,” said Miss Tarragon (no one else would have dared suggest such a thing), “he should be MADE to tumble about

just to harden him; eh? teach him not to bawl. Stuff and nonsense, molly-coddling, eh, Colonel? When I was a child, no one ever troubled their heads about *me*. Got on pretty well, without it: ‘guess I growed,’ like Topsey. All fudge wrapping ‘em up in brown paper; can’t make a parcel of ‘em for life—wouldn’t if I could. Teach ‘em to rough it, Mrs. Brigstock, as I have done.”

I am sure we were all considerably impressed by the specimen before us of what could be done by roughing it. I have felt more patience with Mrs. Brigstock’s folly ever since. My attention now being drawn more particularly towards Miss Tarragon, I must describe her to you. Her face and bust is that of a very old, ill-used doll; but she is five feet eight, and therefore has been reckoned “a fine woman,” I am told. Her hair looks as if it kept on her head by a nail driven through the top of it. Her face is a good deal blunted, as though she had fallen repeatedly on the end of her nose; but she has kept her eyes intact, and makes good use of them. The expression of her face is tart and vigilant. Nothing escapes

her, and she succumbs to no one. The only person for whom I observed that she seemed to entertain some respect was Colonel Shaddock. Not even the Rector's opinions were sacred in her eyes. She knocked them down and buffeted them, so to speak, in the most irreverent manner. I am told she is considered an oracle here,—particularly in all farm and garden matters; is to be seen delving among her roses at six every morning, or mounted on a ladder netting her wall-fruit. She rates the cottager soundly if his field is ill-drilled, or the cuttings she gave him ill-grafted; but she is charitable in her own dictatorial way, though the poor woman must heave a sigh of relief when this imperative lady has deposited her sago and departed.

I was amused in watching and listening to Miss Tarragon, when Miss Montacute asked me to hand her the sugar, which enabled me for the first time to see a pair of large and very intelligent grey eyes. I believe I followed up the opening so far as to remark on the fineness of the strawberries; but the ladies, very soon after this, rose. I picked up a delicate little white glove, and was thanked by a grave

inclination of the head, very different from the flutter of ordinary young ladyhood. As the door closed, young Stapyhton drew his chair near mine, and asked if I had known his brother Bill at Oxford?

No, I had not; what College did he belong to?

"Christ Church. A wild young dog, Mr. Esdaile; not much in your line, I dare say. Only, as I never was at College, I always fancy that men who were there together must have known each other."

"Has wild Bill settled yet what he is going to be?" said the Admiral, as he passed the wine.

"No: he changes his mind every day. He is only fit for an active profession, however. He'll never stick to a desk."

"Well, he is too old for *my* trade, luckily, and I hope he is not fool enough to think of *'listing*. One sodger in the family is enough, I take it. Aye, Colonel, it's all very well shaking your head, but I tell you, sir, the Services are both going to the devil. (Beg pardon, parson.) No discipline; nothing done without interest; a set a-drawing-room puppies, walking the quarter-deck in kid gloves, and young fel-

lows in marching regiments going about with portable tubs and the deuce knows what. Why, sir, in my young day, a man never thought it necessary to have a tub. But it's all of a piece—Horse Guards and Admiralty, both corrupt: a vote, sir, a vote will do anything; and when the head is corrupt, why of course so's the system—rotten throughout!”

I found, from the number of times he returned to it in conversation, that this was a favourite illustration of the Admiral's. The parts in his argument did not, indeed, quite hang together: for the connexion between the tubs and the Horse Guards was not clear, I believe, to any of our minds; but it was forcible, and had been heard so often by every one present except myself, that no one thought of examining it minutely.

“Well, Admiral,” said Jack Stapylton with a merry smile, “in spite of this, you'll be glad to hear that Ned continues to like his regiment and the service altogether immensely. He writes from India in the best spirits, and gives such an account of his tiger hunts, that I long to be in his shoes.”

“ Better stick to the Dorminster Pack and old England, Jack. Pity you can’t make something of a sportsman of Phil. I can’t bear to see a fine young fellow stewing over his books as he does, and not caring for a gun or a horse.”

“ Phil is the scholar of the family, Admiral. He represents the learning and respectability of us all, as becomes the eldest son.”

“ How many brothers have you, Mr. Stapylton ?” I asked.

“ In the words of the poet, ‘ We are seven.’ I have six natural enemies ; and as such we fought in the nursery, though now we are very good friends. Mr. Brigstock consoled my mother after the birth of Willie, the youngest of us, by telling her that seven was a mystic number, that meant all sorts of good things ; didn’t you, sir ?”

“ Your mother had no need of consolation : she is too devout a Christian, and too exemplary a parent ; but I *did* point out to her that in Scripture the number seven was singularly blest. In Joseph’s dream——”

“ Exactly ; and the seven champions of Chris-

tendom, and so on. But it does seem hard there shouldn't have been a sister amongst the seven. There was no provision against *that*, you know—eh?”

“Aye,” said Colonel Shaddock, in his peculiarly gentle voice; “your mother, sir, would have been glad of a girl, I doubt not.”

“Nothing like girls, Colonel,” said the Admiral, “depend on it. A man always wishes for a boy. I did: now I’m d—— very glad I never had one. No trouble, no bother with daughters,—looking out for their futures, and so on. There they are, and there they remain.”

“You cannot expect them, my dear Admiral, to remain with you *always*,” rejoined the courtly old Colonel, smiling. “That would be supposing all the youngsters to have very bad taste. I am glad, however, that you appreciate the gifts the Gods have sent you.”

Mr. Brigstock looked slightly shocked at this Pagan form of speech, and remarked that they were, indeed, very estimable young women, of whom any father might be proud. The Admiral took a pinch of snuff, and turned to Jack Stapylton.

“How is the Squire’s twinge of the gout? I met him on his grey cob two days ago, and he complained still,—said he couldn’t ride. He is too fond of your fine old claret, Jack. Ha, ha! he should be as abstemious as I am,” and the old gentleman filled his glass with port for the seventh or eighth time.

“It is my belief the governor could vault over a five-barred gate, if he chose. At all events, he is not as bad as he fancies, or likes *us* to fancy him: he walked all round my farm to-day, and talks of going up to Ascot next week.”

“I trust you will dissuade him, Mr. John,” said the Rector, “from so rash an enterprise, and in pursuit, too, of that earthly bubble-pleasure. Think of what it is,—over in a few brief hours, and what remains?”

“Very true,” said Jack with the air of one profoundly convinced; but I suspect the sly dog was laughing in his sleeve.

“Besides,” continued the Rector, “as I never fail to point out from the pulpit, when the time of the neighbouring races draws near, such amusements as *these* are in reality the encourage-

ment of theft and rascality in all shapes. There is your vagrant gipseey and your thimble-rigger, your pick-pocket and vendor of strong drinks, your bettors and gamblers, your——”

“Ah!” said Jack, getting impatient under this exordium; “it is precisely on *that* account, you see the governor enjoys a race course beyond all things,—the opportunity of picking up subjects for his pet hobby, the Reformatory.”

“It is perfectly inconceivable,” said the Rector warmly, “how Mr. Stapylton can have taken up that absurd idea: a strong-minded sensible man, as he is, to be carried away by such an Utopian scheme!”

“It is to give these poor young rascals a *chance* of becoming honest,” said the Colonel mildly.

“Honest?” repeated Mr. Brigstock, “Why, sir, what was the first thing that two of them did on leaving the Reformatory? To rob Mr. Stapylton’s—their benefactor’s—*orchard*! What do you think of *that*, sir, by way of reformation?”

“Apples have proved a sore temptation from

the beginning of all things," said the Colonel, smiling, "but if the system——"

"Rotten from the head downwards," remarked the Admiral, somewhat indistinctly, "and when that is corrupt, the members——"

"Still, if we can prove that in some cases it has done good," insisted the Colonel; but the Rector waved his hand deprecatingly.

"Colonel Shaddock, excuse me, but it will be the bane of our country—this sentimental interest in crime. What! will you tell me it is fitting to see a young scoundrel, who should be expiating his sins against society at the galleys——"

"Put 'em all in chains, sir, and the Black Hole," murmured the Admiral.

"I say, will you tell me it is fitting to see such a young miscreant pampered in the lap of luxury, *driving out in an open carriage*—yes, actually Mr. Forsepp was seen with one of these juvenile malefactors on the box of his britska—while the honest and hard-working tramp wearily mile after mile on the dusty road? Again, I ask, is it a justifiable step to endanger the morals and safety of a neighbourhood, hitherto singularly free from vice, by introducing into it a portion

of the dregs of the community, and accustoming our youth to the spectacle of crime *rewarded*: for so it is, sir; put it as you will, so it is. And whose property is safe, when these interesting young criminals, after a year or two's clever dissimulation, are let loose on society? Who can rest at ease, feeling that this hotbed of villany is within a few miles of him? I am only thankful," added Mr. Brigstock, washing his hands vehemently in his finger glass, "that this Reformatory is not in *my* parish. Its being six miles distant of course precludes the necessity of *my* interfering in the matter, and it would have been painful to me to oppose strenuously any scheme of Mr. Stapylton's. But" (here he wiped his fingers) "I thought it my duty to let him know my views, and I have no further responsibility in the matter."

I was glad to see coffee brought in just then, not only because it put a stop to the Rector's angry diatribes, but because the Admiral had replenished his glass so constantly, that I began to feel uneasy as to how he would accomplish his voyage to the drawing-room. Jack Stapylton swallowed his cup of coffee; then, feeling, no

doubt, that he had enjoyed enough of the Rector's conversation, rose carelessly, and without waiting for the "elders," sauntered out of the room to the ladies.

"A fine young fellow, that," said the Colonel.

I thought so too, as I looked after him: and the Admiral, rousing suddenly, burst in,

"Aye, aye;—but see him ride to hounds! No man goes so straight as Jack. Then as to a shot;—I'll back him against any man in the county. Gad! sir, it's a terrible pity he is not the eldest son, instead of that land-lubber, Phil."

"I like Philip Stapylton, and I respect him too," said the Colonel, mildly. "All men can't have the same tastes, my dear Admiral, and his, I am sure, do no one any harm."

"I don't say that they do: but to think of his succeeding the Squire! that jolly old cock! and he that does nothing that *I* can see, but *parley-vous* and *squallini* at the piano. Why he don't know a pig from a potatoe, let alone sporting. He is obliged to get Jack to do all his farming business, and when he comes to the estate, he'll be as ignorant as a child about it."

“Shall we join the ladies, Admiral?” said the Rector, rising.

When we entered the drawing-room, Miss Tarragon’s voice was heard exclaiming in a high pitch, above every one else,

“Brown paper and vinegar! Stuff and nonsense, Mrs. Brigstock, about *pomade divine*! When I bark my shins, I never use anything but paper. I should like to know if you’d *pomade divine* in the Peninsular, Colonel? He! he!”

She sat in a high-backed chair, with one leg crossed on the other, and by a periodical movement of the foot, kicked out the flimsy silk of which her skirt was formed, lending thereby great emphasis to her discourse.

But my attention was soon more agreeably occupied with the figures of two young girls who had joined the party since dinner. These, I found, were Miss Montacute’s younger sisters. The elder of the two, Linda they called her, is a graceful animated girl, the least good-looking of the three sisters, and I should fancy the most popular. The youngest, who rejoices in the singular name of Vanda, is strikingly handsome, but shy and proud-looking. I can hardly

believe she is an English girl: her movements and carriage have, in a yet greater degree, the peculiarity I observed in her eldest sister; and there is a grandeur in all the lines of her figure which I have never seen but in some of the Florentine frescoes. I was so engaged in watching her that I did not observe Mrs. Brigstock ask Miss Montacute to play. But immediately she sat down to the piano and passed her fingers over the keys my attention was arrested. I have rarely heard such a touch. It has a nervous power, which seems independent of the mechanical agent. It affected me almost magnetically: I felt it to my fingers' ends, and remained entranced while she played two or three of Chopin's wild mazurkas in succession. Nearly everyone in the room talked, but that made no difference; for I was far away, watching a group of Polish peasants in their frozen forests, clanking their heels round a fire to the music of their native dance. The fine expressive head seen over the piano was admirably in character with such a scene. I could observe it better than I had done yet. In full-face it was much less handsome than in profile, but the same power

and sensibility that characterized her playing were strongly written there. The varying expressions passed over it like clouds, but the power remained. There was nothing weak or irresolute in a single line, and the breadth of forehead, too great perhaps for beauty, seemed to indicate the same grasp and vigour of intellect. The different effect produced on me by the two heads I have described was curious. My eyes were fascinated by the beauty of the youngest sister, but when once fixed on the elder I could not take them away. It was as though she said, "I know it is difficult to make you look at me, but having looked you are mine now and cannot escape." How far this might be the effect of her divine playing, I will not stop to enquire. Suffice it that I was hardly able to murmur the most common-place thanks: while Mrs. Brigstock, who had been pouring her nursery troubles into Mrs. Halliday's ear ever since Miss Montacute began, broke off, and exclaimed,

"A charming set of waltzes, that. Thank you. So much obliged."

Miss Tarragon was honester, at least.

"Do you call that music, Ellice? It may be

all very fine, that hopping up and down the piano, but I like something that's got a tune in it. It's as if a rat had got into the piano. Humbug! anyone *pretending* to like that!"

"Play some of the 'Elijah,' Ellice dear," said Miss Halliday.

Miss Montacute shook her head and beckoning to her sisters, said with a smile,

"They shall sing something adapted to the capacity of the audience. Instrumental music is not popular here, you know."

This was spoken with the most perfect good humour: and she began to accompany her sisters in a lively little air, the words of which I could not recognise as belonging to any language I had ever heard. When I asked the question at its close, it was with a latent dread that it might be English. I was as much relieved as surprised to find it was Polish. The voices were small but in tune; the singing spirited, and it met with an encore, in which Mr. Jack Stapyhton was especially loud.

"And now, Mr. Esdaile, will *you* favor us?" said Mrs. Brigstock; "we are sure you sing, from the interest you take about the choir.

Have you your music? I dare say one of the young ladies will accompany you. What! not sing at all, nor play? Well, I'm quite disappointed. I intend my Tommy to learn the piano as soon as he can read. Such a nice occupation, and so refined."

Miss Tarragon's skirt was agitated in great scorn; I turned to the younger members of the society who were grouped round the piano. Jack Stapylton was looking over some songs with Miss Linda, but they seemed to find each other's conversation more interesting than the score. The stately Vanda leant over her eldest sister's chair: and I ventured to say to Miss Montacute,

"You are evidently a capital musician. Could not you and your sisters do something to improve our miserable choir? Have you never thought of taking it in hand?"

"I tried, but the organist resented my interference. Mr. Brigstock neither knows nor cares whether voices and organ are in the same key; so I had no assistance from him, and my class fell to the ground."

"I hope to establish one, and if you will assist me I think we shall improve in time. I

will smooth all the difficulties for you and promise you shall have no trouble with the organist."

"And, oh! Mr. Esdaile," said Miss Linda, "if you could stop that clerk's ridiculous way of *roaring* the responses, you would deserve a vote of public thanks."

"'Pon my soul," chimed in Jack, "it's as much as one's gravity can stand sometimes. When he 'pants,' like the '*cart* for cooling streams,' I long to oblige him with a good ducking."

Miss Linda laughed. She and her elder sister consented to take in hand the class for congregational singing I am anxious to form; but Miss Vanda only muttered something about having no talent for teaching. The fair Halliday (whose musical powers, I am told, are of the most rudimentary description) immediately offered her services, and of course I could not decline them. It was a new, though a small excitement.

"You know, Mr. Esdaile," she said gravely, "my desire is to be of some use in my generation, that my life may be earnest, and not altogether thrown away. Point out to me any sacrifice I ought to make, and I will make it."

This was said in the star-lit lane, as I was accompanying her home; the Colonel being in front with Mrs. Halliday. That lady had wished to accept the offer of his brougham, but her daughter protested so plaintively against being shut up, and assumed so ill-used a tone, that her mamma yielded. I ventured to reply, therefore, to the young lady's remark,

“Perhaps the best sacrifice you can make, is that of your own tastes and wishes to those of others.”

I have now brought down this veracious journal, my dear sister, to within two days of this date. I shall continue writing, as I have done, by snatches, from time to time, and only dispatch the result when it shall have assumed the size of a respectable budget. Let me have your comments on the same. Tell me what impression the people I introduce to you make. Criticise the sayings and doings of your brother as freely as you used in the happy home-days that are gone, alas! never to be renewed; and with love to Fritz,

Believe me always, etc., etc.

II.

July 20.

THANK you, my dear Mary, for your letter, which I received yesterday. I rejoiced in the good accounts it brought of you and Fritz, and—though last, not least (except physically)—of that important baby. When you say that Mrs. Brigstock “has transferred her happiness from her husband’s keeping to that of her children,” are you sensible, ma’am, that few domestic ladies serve these two masters equally well? that if they retain their affection for their lords in all its first warmth and freshness, the children are almost invariably neglected? and that if (as with Mrs. B.) the nursery is the first consideration, it is very often the last and only one? I see you shake your head indignantly, and point to Fritz smoking his pipe

on one side, and the crib on the other. In answer to this, I only beg to remark that you are not yet surrounded by *six* cribs, as is the case with the worthy Rector's wife. You observe, with your usual acumen, that I seem better pleased with my new life, towards the end of my letter, than I was at its commencement. You are right; and all you say of the *dramatis personæ* in it is capital. But you seem to think I am too severe on Miss Halliday; you have "no doubt there is some real good under all that exaggeration." Neither have I.

She belongs to a class of young ladies very common now, which had no existence some twenty years ago. In their principles (which are the result probably of some disappointment in love, or what they call such) there is a noble wish and intention, which only wants the ballast of sound judgment to render it very valuable: in the exaggeration of these principles there is much that is morbid and unhealthy. This is the case with the young lady in question. Do not think me severe, for indeed I am hopeful of seeing her a more "enlightened instrument of good," to use her own phrase,

than she now is. I cannot help, as you know, smiling over the little follies of my neighbours; but this does not prevent my learning, every day I live, that there is more good in the world than we often give it credit for. In this parish, among high and low, I find plenty to confirm this view of human nature. It is true I also find prejudice, jealousy, ingratitude. I am obliged to guard myself against *expecting* any return for the interest I may feel among the poor, or that my views will be understood and shared by any among my rich parishioners.

The Rector and I are as wide apart as ever, and as friendly. Were it not for the interest I already feel in this village, and the hope of doing some good here in my own way, I should endeavour to find a curacy where my views were not so diametrically opposed to those of my "chief." Perhaps, however, for that very reason (I sometimes argue with myself) I am of more use here. By a little tact and management, I have already been able to work a beneficial change in some small matters, without actually opposing Mr. Brigstock. He now allows me to have the management of the school pretty

much in my own hands. Our choral singing—thanks to the ladies—is improving. We have two evenings' practice in the week, when every one is invited to join; and the Miss Montacutes give some of the boys and girls instruction separately at their own house. All this has been the cause of my seeing these young ladies a good deal lately,—more than any one else indeed. They are not an easy family to know; and their history, which I will tell you as I gathered it from Colonel Shaddock in a walk two days since, accounts in some measure for this.

Their father is a retired Admiral. Besides his pay they have very little to live on; and, unless the Admiral has saved in former years, from his prize-monies, etc., these three girls will be left miserably off at his death. Their mother had no fortune: she was a Polish lady, of great beauty and accomplishment, who was reduced, by circumstances, to become a governess. The Admiral met her abroad, fell in love, and married her; though my informant just hinted that it was probable the lady only accepted him to escape from her dependent posi-

tion. At all events, he gave me to understand there was a great prejudice against her in England: whether justified by her conduct, he either could not, or would not, say; and when the Admiral was ordered to the coast of Africa, Mrs. Montacute, instead of remaining in England, which she couldn't bear, went to Warsaw with her children. She never left it: she was seized with a painful illness before the Admiral's return, and under it she lingered some time, unable to leave her native country.

The Admiral during this period was almost constantly employed. When his wife died, and he went to Warsaw to bring back his children, his eldest daughter was fourteen. That is nine years ago. They have lived here ever since, in a little cottage that was left to the Admiral when he was a young man, but where his wife only resided three years. The Colonel informs me that the youngest daughter, Vanda, is the exact image of her mother. It is not difficult to understand that poverty, a foreign education, and the fact of their mother having been slighted in England, which she probably never forgot, should have had the effect of making the eldest

of these girls, at least, reserved, and preventing her from being very intimate with any of the young ladies about here, with none of whom she has very congenial tastes. Mrs. Stapylton has been very kind to them, and the second daughter, Linda, used to be constantly at Stapylton Manor; of late, not so much so.

The youngest, I confess myself as yet unable to fathom. She seems dissatisfied with her present life, as far as I can make out. She has not much occupation, and I sometimes fancy that her eldest sister is rather uneasy about her; but I may be mistaken. She says very little, which may be from the depth of her reflections, or from their shallowness; and, in spite of her remarkable beauty, it does not seem that she has any special admirers among the young men of the neighbourhood. I am bound to add that she offers very little encouragement. To myself, though I have been now several times at the house, she has not addressed half-a-dozen words; and though I admire her almost as much as the Venus of Milo, I feel just as little inclination to talk to her.

I must describe their cottage, for it is characteristic of its gallant owner, and you have probably no idea that a nautical color can be given to anything so far inland. There is a terrace in front, which is the nearest approach to a quarter-deck that can be fashioned out of grass and gravel. A couple of miniature cannon, and a mast with ropes and flying pennant, in the most correct style, complete the likeness. Beyond this, in the young ladies' domain, the flowers blossom luxuriantly, but here not a bud, not a daisy, is to be seen. Within, the walls are hung all round with drawings of vessels in every possible attitude—except topsy-turvy. One, in full sail “off Cape Finisterre,” under the command of Rear-Admiral Montacute, C.B.; and one, dismasted, in a howling sea, and evidently under no command but that of the winds and waves. There is an Indian cabinet, and some Chinese screens, two great jars from Japan, and a variety of large and curious shells. Everything speaks of long voyages, and seems to have a smell of the salt sea. The furniture is exceedingly old and shabby; but Miss Montacute's books and work, and the open piano and the flowers, give

the little room an air of comfort many a grander apartment wants.

The Admiral and I are very good friends. I do not suppose it is necessary to give you a metaphysical analysis of his character. He met me yesterday as I was leaving the church, when we had the following conversation :—

“ Good day, Mr. Esdaile. What have you been doing there? It’s none of your Saint’s days, is it? Didn’t see the girls getting their tackle ready this morning.”

“ I have been christening a child, Admiral—Mrs. Crump the baker’s wife’s first baby. A love of fine names prevails here, I see, as elsewhere. The future baker of Ashford is Marmaduke Crump.

“ Aye, aye—women are always foolish, Sir, about names. My poor wife, she christened her eldest after my old friend Ellice, who gave her a passage home from the Mediterranean—(not allowed to take one’s own wife, though one may another man’s, Mr. Esdaile). It was no use telling her that Ellice wasn’t a woman’s name. She could see no difference between it and Alice (she was a foreigner, Mr. Esdaile), and so she would

have it. The second, I insisted on being named after their great aunt, Mrs. Belinda Montacute, but her mother would never call her anything but Linda, and so the old lady took offence and didn't leave her a farthing. The third is named after her poor mother. Aye, it's all very well to ask 'What's in a name?' and then to say, 'a nose by any other name would smell as sweet.' It's not true, Sir. *All* depends in life on the christening, and women are so ——— proof; Ellice is as obstinate as my old friend Billy himself, and Vanda is the only one that is the image of her poor dear mother. Ah!"

"Are you speaking of Captain William Ellice, Admiral, who is now on half-pay?"

"The same, to be sure; and a terrible shame it is. Left unemployed—got disgusted—went on the retired list. All the fault of the present iniquitous system, Sir: the First Lord, a servile dependent on family and parliamentary interest; and when the head is corrupt, why all the members ———"

"Exactly. Captain William Ellice is my mother's cousin. I have been told that his ungovernable temper and violent language was

the cause of his having remained unemployed for so many years.

“Tut, tut, my good Sir, in our day no man ever gave an order on the quarter-deck without a dozen good round oaths. And so Bill Ellice is your cousin, is he? Why, it makes us seem almost related too, Mr. Esdaile; for Billy is quite like an uncle to the girls. Temper! Lord bless you! ask *them* whether he is bad-tempered.”

I did ask them several questions concerning our almost-unknown cousin when we reached the cottage, and was informed by Miss Linda, who was more loquacious in the Captain's praise than his god-daughter, that he was “the dearest old fellow in the world—spoils us all—a trifle warm, perhaps, and headstrong, but such a generous heart! and then *so* amusing—has seen so much of the world—tells such good stories.” In short, on the strength of my relationship to the Captain, the young ladies and I became more intimate than we have yet been.

July 26th.—I mentioned in my first letter a row of cottages on the slope of the hill that had attracted my attention particularly from their trim gardens. One of these gardens has been looking

neglected for the last fortnight. In it live a man and his wife who are in great affliction from the death of their only child. This expression does not convey a right idea of the state of the man's mind. It is a sullen savage hopelessness, unbrightened by a ray of faith. The poor mother in all her grief has a firm and humble trust, but the effect produced on her husband by this blow renders her wretched.

"O, Sir!" she said to me, while the tears poured down her cheeks, "it was the only thing he cared for—the only soft place in John's heart, for he's got hard-like since we married, and don't care much, now he's used to me—but the child! It were our only one, as ever we've had; and O sir, when he says to me, 'Wife, how can you ask me to believe in a God of mercy that takes away the only thing I cared for?' what can I say, Sir? I tells him it's a dispensation, but he laughs bitter-like, and calls it parson's jargon (humbly begging your pardon, Sir). Will you please speak to him?"

I found John Hurst in that frame of mind on which it is the most difficult to make any impression. I told him how God tries those whom

he loves through their affections. "If a friend, John, were going away for a time and gave his garden into your charge, to look after, though you trained and watered the flowers and spent all your thoughts and your heart on it, yet would you hesitate to give it back to him when he came and claimed it again? Wouldn't you feel that it was not yours,—only lent you for a time? Well, so it is, John, that God lends us those we love. He means us to love and tend them. He doesn't want us to be cold and indifferent to His blessings, but he expects us to resign them without murmuring when he calls them back. Those who are cold and worldly-hearted he tries in other ways."

"Why is Sam Timson's children left all sound and healthy?" said John, surlily. "He's got seven, and they ha'n't a scratch, and the eldest rising fifteen. He's none so good, neither, is Sam, for the matter o' that."

"Perhaps for that very reason his children are spared; but we can none of us foresee the secret workings of Providence. In this world, remember, the good are not all rewarded and the wicked punished. Very often it is just the contrary."

“Aye. I don’t see as your psalm-singers is any better off; and how do you make out that God is just, if he don’t make any difference? There’s Nell says her prayers as reg’lar as clock-work, why warn’t the child spared for *her* sake?”

“If there were not another world beyond this, John, it *would* be unjust; but Nell and I believe that those who have suffered here in patient faith will be rewarded by and by.”

He shook his head incredulously, and I said no more, thinking it wiser not to insist too far just then. The next day I gave Nelly Hurst one of those coarse German woodcuts we bought at Munich. It represents a group of angels bearing a little child up to heaven. She promised to pin it up on the wall opposite their bed, and who knows but that, as the rising sun strikes through the lattice there, and John’s eyes open on it day after day, that little print may do more than all my talking?

What some people would call “a curious coincidence,” happened a morning or two after my conversation with the Hursts. I go down to the river every morning between five and six o’clock to bathe. Some of the village youths who

were there the first morning I went down plunged about in the water like hippopotami—though far less at their ease, for they were evidently ignorant of the noble art of swimming. I undertook to teach them. Before I knew what I had engaged upon, I found my class increased to some twelve or fifteen, and by the following morning, when the noise of my *école de natation* had been bruited abroad, there were no less than twenty. One of these is the son of the Sam Timson Hurst spoke of so enviously; and a tall shrewd-looking boy he is, somewhat of a scamp I suspect; but, like most of the boys in this parish, he has been much neglected. On the morning in question he was very nearly drowned. He struck out boldly (for he has plenty of pluck and adventure in his composition), when I had shown him how to use his arms and legs, and the river carried him down, to the admiration of some of his more awkward companions, until I called out to him not to go too far, and he attempted to turn and breast the stream. Then, from nervousness or some other cause, he began to use arms and feet both at once, and bellowing lustily, down he sank, just where the river is deepest and the weeds grow thick and

long. Had I not been so near, he would never have risen, for his feet were completely entangled. It was a minute or two before I could reach him, and when I brought him up he was insensible. A good rubbing on the warm bank, and a sound scolding (I dare say) from his mother when he got home, brought him round, but you may guess how John Hurst received the intelligence.

“Oh! of course not! Sam Timson’s son isn’t drowned. No harm will ever happen to *him*. If it had been *my* son he’d ha’ gone to the bottom, and no one to pull him up. Preach away about justice: that’s right.”

I walked over to Stapylton Hall one day last week to return the Squire’s visit. The gout first and then his visit to London had prevented his calling before. Mr. Jack, too, was away, so I had seen nothing of the family. The Squire was out, but Mrs. Stapylton was at home. The house is a comfortable frightful English mansion, one wing alone retaining the distinctive character of a much older building. From this wing rises a square grey stone tower almost covered with ivy. The remainder of the old building was pulled down and rebuilt in the reign of George III.,

an epoch when architects seem to have tried how ugly it was possible to make a human habitation, and to have crowned their efforts with the most complete success.

I was shown into a large drawing-room with a bay window, the blinds of which were drawn up to the top, so that the afternoon sun, pouring into the room and lighting up every corner and crevice with painful brilliancy, made one's eyes ache. The faded chintz covers, stretched upon the hard bony-looking chairs and sofas, demonstrated the number of seasons the sun had thus streamed, blindless, into the room. There were few books and no flowers; some grim ladies and gentlemen, with very straight stiff bodies, hung round the walls, and on a round marble table beside Mrs. Stapylton lay the *Times*, a pair of spectacles, and Livingston's *Travels*. That lady was employed in some plain—very plain—work, and rose with formal courtesy to receive me, pointing to a chair opposite to her, and facing those blazing windows. As it was a warm day, and I had walked rather fast, my position was not enviable. Mrs. Stapylton is a thin precise woman, who has once been good-looking, in a

hard way, and is of a very noble family. I make no doubt she has some good qualities: I shall let you know as soon as I have found them out. In conversation she cannot be said to shine. She never allows you, in the first place, to forget that you are addressing Mrs. Stapylton of Stapylton Hall. The sense of her importance is no doubt increased from the fact of her not having gone beyond a circle of ten miles from home during twenty years. She said, speaking of Mr. Forsepp's family, that they were "new people: I hardly know them. Mr. Stapylton wished me to call, as Mr. Forsepp has taken a great interest about the Reformatory; but in our county it has *never* been the custom to visit manufacturers, when they come and settle near us."

"You make some concession to the times, I suppose, Mrs. Stapylton. The manufacturers are the great men of England now: where should we be without them?"

"This admixture of classes is a great evil in the present day," said the lady frigidly. "There are, no doubt, many excellent persons among them, but you must draw the line *somewhere*.

I beg your pardon, but I believe yours is an old Huntingdonshire family?"

Soon after this she rang the bell and sent the servant to see if Mr. Philip was at home.

"He has his own set of apartments: we never see him until dinner time. My son unfortunately shuns general society" (this was said in a very hard voice), "but he sometimes likes the conversation of an intelligent person—like yourself. Mr. Stapylton and myself would be glad if he could be induced to mix more. I mention it in case you have the opportunity, as a clergyman, some time or other, of speaking to him about it."

I hardly knew how to reply to this: but the servant entered at that moment to say that Mr. Philip was not in the Old Tower; he had been seen walking out.

"I am sorry that neither Mr. Stapylton nor my son should be within," said the lady, as I rose; "it has always been our custom to be on friendly terms with the clergy in our neighbourhood, and we shall hope to see you often, Mr. Esdaile. Mr. Brigstock is a very excellent person: unfortunately my sons do not like him. I have hopes that the example and society of a

younger clergyman may be of benefit to them. Young men will be young men, you know, Mr. Esdaile; and my son John is wilder than I could wish at his age. He has great abilities—all my sons have: they only require a little wholesome regulation. I hear you very highly spoken of at Ashford, I am happy to tell you. It gives Mr. Stapylton and myself great pleasure to encourage rectitude of conduct, and we shall have pleasure in attending to any deserving cases you may bring to our notice. I shall be happy to show you my school any Saturday afternoon, Mr. Esdaile: I superintend it entirely myself. If you like to go back through the gardens and shubbery, you will find a wicket to your left hand that leads you a pleasant cut across the park. Good morning.”

Mrs. Stapylton extended a bony hand, and rang the bell. I crossed the great hall full of stuffed birds in glass cases, “wide-a-wakes” of all shapes and colors, whips, and riding-gloves. The servant directed me to the gardens, of course full of beautiful flowers, but stiffened up in beds of the most tasteless form, like fair creatures thrust into ugly ill-made gowns. No

artistic arrangement of color, or happy combination of lines ; but excellent gardening, no doubt, and very fine lawn and gravel. I found the wicket and crossed the park. A stream runs through it, on the bank of which stand some grand old beeches. The path leads close to one of these. Under it lay at full length a young man, smoking a short meerschaum pipe and reading an old folio volume. His straw hat lay on the grass beside him, so that I could observe his head well as I approached. He had a light brown beard, hazy blue eyes, and a broad forehead full of bumps and inequalities : what, I suppose, you phrenologists would pronounce not well-balanced, though undoubtedly no common head. As to whether he would be called good-looking, I could hardly determine : it would probably depend on his expression in speaking, and, after that, on the individual taste and sympathy of those who gave an opinion.

The young man did not hear me approach until I was close to him : he then looked up in some surprise, but did not attempt to move or take any further notice of me. Had I heard nothing of his peculiar character, I should have

introduced myself to Mr. Philip Stapylton—for I had no doubt it was he—but knowing that the intrusion would probably be very distasteful, I left him to the uninterrupted enjoyment of his worm-eaten old volume, under the flickering shadows of the beech leaves.

Strange, I thought to myself, he looks more like a dreamy German student than the son and heir of an old English Squire. What a freak of Nature, to make that incarnation of country pomp and decorum I have just left the mother of this Rousseau. I wonder whether he is anything better than a sentimental *fainéant*? I cannot help laughing at the amusing impertinence with which Mrs. Stapylton dictated the part I was to play in her family; though, to say the truth, I feel more curiosity in it than her manners, poor lady, quite justify. I must find out more about this young man. One good thing I have already discovered—that he is wholly unlike his mamma.

On the road home I overtook Colonel Shaddock and his dog Ponto. We skirted an enclosure where several colts and fillies were gambolling, and I remarked,

“The Squire seems to have quite a nursery of young horses here. Does he breed them himself?”

“Yes—yes;” then, after a little hesitation, “for racing purposes, you know. The Squire is fond of the turf.”

“Indeed! Has he a racing establishment?”

“Yes: but not here. Mrs. Stapylton don’t much like the sort of thing (here he nodded his head sagaciously). Indeed, I’m afraid, Mr. Esdaile, but this is between you and me, that he has been rather unfortunate lately. He lost a large sum on the Derby, I know, and it is *said* that he was still more unfortunate at Ascot, the other day: I hope it ain’t true. It’s a pity to see a man with seven sons wasting his money so—and a good-hearted generous man too, sir, only a trifle thoughtless for his years. Have you seen him? Quite the old English gentleman.”

“No: but I suppose Mr. Jack resembles him somewhat—in his tastes, at least: he is a fine *young* English gentleman, frank and free; something amazingly pleasant about him.”

“Aye: *rather* too much of the Squire’s tastes, I’m afraid. He is his father’s favourite, and

ever since he was a boy has always gone about with him to races, and so no wonder he takes to it. His father has paid some large sums for him; but he is steadying down, I hope, *now*."

A sly smile twinkled in the Colonel's eye; but I forbore questioning him, and observed that the elder son, at all events, gave his father no anxiety on this score.

"No; I believe the Squire would like him better if he did."

"Is the property entailed?"

"Yes."

"Then surely it is fortunate the heir does not inherit these ruinous tastes; otherwise there would be little left for his brothers."

"He would be much happier, I believe, if he were *not* the heir. He don't care for money, and would be content on a hundred a year, I believe, with his books, if he were left in peace. Poor Phil! that's what he doesn't have here."

"Why does he remain at home doing nothing? Surely it would be better, if he and his father can't get on, to separate."

“The Squire won’t hear of it: he says he ought to learn to look after this large property; and I’m afraid,” added the Colonel sorrowfully, “that he keeps him rather close. He would be happier away from home; but he is a good son, and, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Stapylton is a *little* difficult, sometimes. I like him: I have a regard for the young man, though I rarely see him. My society, sir, could give him no pleasure, I know; but we are very good friends when we meet.”

“I wonder he has not married, in a neighbourhood thick with pretty girls.”

“Ah! ‘thereby hangs a tale,’ sir: the cause why, I fear, he and his father never can be really very cordial again. He was prevented from marrying the only woman he has ever seemed to care for; but I must do the Squire the justice to say his objections were not unreasonable; and Mrs. Stapylton’s were even stronger, you see.”

“Then I will answer for it, the lady was not one of your county families.”

“Oh! she was not from his neighbourhood at all. It was when Philip was at one of the German Universities, and——”

“Ah! I thought he had been brought up in Germany.”

“And the lady whose acquaintance he made there had been an actress, a singer, or something of the sort, and was many years older than he. She was perfectly respectable, and living then a retired life; a very charming woman, I understand. Indeed, she acted most admirably throughout; for when the Squire went over to get Philip out of his entanglement, he found that, though his son offered to abandon family and home and everything if she would only marry him, she refused to let him sacrifice himself, and the Squire brought him home in triumph. Let me see—that must be nine or ten years ago: he was just then twenty. Since then, in spite of all his mother’s manœuvres, sir, he has never been more than distantly civil to a woman.”

“That,” said I, smiling, “is a wonderful instance of constancy in these days. But does he do absolutely nothing but cultivate his ‘æsthetic’ tendencies in his solitude?”

The Colonel looked rather puzzled at that fine word, but replied, “He don’t understand

much about rents and farming, I suppose, and as Jack is so much here, he thinks it as well to leave it to him, who is a sharp fellow in all agricultural matters, you see."

"That is a mistake," I said. "As the property will be his, he should make himself master of all the business connected with it now."

"Perhaps so, Mr. Esdaile. We're none of us perfect, sir; and perhaps the young man follows the bent of his own tastes too much. But I'm bound to say he does what he can, in his *own* way, for the tenantry,—gives them lectures at one of the farm-houses on the winter evenings occasionally, with simple experiments, and so forth. Then he takes an interest in his father's pet hobby,—the Reformatory."

"I'm glad to hear it," I said. "Does it work well?"

"It does, sir, most excellently. I am one of the committee. In these matters, with all humility and with due respect to Mr. Brigstock, I venture to judge for myself. The system, as pursued by us here, seems to me to present none of the alarming features our worthy Rector sees: the boys are hard worked; they are

no better fed than the lowest class of labourers. Great advantages, no doubt they have, but only such as must follow from their being in an enlightened Christian establishment, in cleanliness, in a pure air, with no temptation to thieve, and every encouragement to do well, for four whole years, Mr. Esdaile. Dear me! sir, if we had not had a chance given us, as boys, where would most of us be now, I should like to know? I remember distinctly" (the Colonel prudently dropped his voice here) "robbing my master's orchard more than once at school. For less than that, some of these poor little urchins have been *imprisoned*, and come out worse than they went in. We save them from this, Mr. Esdaile."

"Have they all turned out well hitherto? How many have you?"

"Sixty, and all are doing well, though some of course better than others. Curious to say, the worst—the most neglected and depraved of the poor young wretches—turn out the best, and are less difficult to deal with than those carefully brought up. I can't tell you *why*: I leave the philosophers to answer that, sir."

We shook hands, and parted.

The fine qualities of the old soldier's heart, his kindly nature that is pained to think ill of any human being, his unostentatious charities, his clear good sense, and modest opinion of himself, have drawn me towards him the more I have seen him. If he alludes to the Peninsular, it is never to mention any personal feats of his own; when he speaks of the West Indies, where he held an important command for many years, it is only to amuse children (who always crowd round him) with stories of sharks and alligators. His old age, though solitary, is not a lonely one. He has such an extended sympathy with his fellow-creatures, that he is always occupied and cheerful in thinking for others. And surely no one grudges him his gardens and hot-house, his pigs and his poultry, his sleek horses and his well-fed dogs. Even Miss Tarragon, as I wrote to you, becomes subdued and mollified in the presence of Colonel Shadlock

July 28th.—I am going to finish my long letter this evening with two important announcements, one of a public, the other of a strictly *private*

nature. Having done my day's work, I thought I would avail myself of the Admiral's general invitation, and pay him and his daughters a visit after dinner. I found them all drinking tea on the lawn, just under the "quarter-deck," where a witch elm spreads the shade of its fantastic branches. It was only seven o'clock—for we keep primitive hours here, in our *home* lives—and the sun still lighted up the quartette round the tea-table. There was the Admiral reading aloud an article, which couldn't interest any one, from to-day's *Times*, and the young ladies plying their works with busy fingers; though I had much sooner one of them had been employed on the zither that lay beside her. But Miss Montacute continued her work, and Miss Linda almost immediately drew me into a discussion about making tea, in which the Admiral threw in his evidence as to the practice in China; and then Miss Linda became so animated about the delicate yellow tea in great Russian houses, and thence to Russians in general, that I saw no prospect of hearing the little Tyrolean instrument. Just when she was in the full swing of her most amusing

descriptions, there was a step on the gravel walk, and she turned quickly round. An exclamation burst from her lips, and every one seemed much astonished when Jack Stapylton walked up and held out his hand. (N.B.—First to her, and then to the Admiral, etc.) It was impossible to mistake the expression of delight in the young lady's face, even had I not seen something similar once on the countenance of a Miss Mary Esdaile when a certain German Baron unexpectedly made his appearance.

“Why, when did you come? We thought you were in London!”

“So I am: I'm dining out in Belgrave Square; at least, grammatically speaking, I ought to was, only some particular business of the governor's called me suddenly down here. I left by the three o'clock train.”

“Then you haven't been home yet?” said the Admiral.

“No: I couldn't help running in as I passed. Here's some music for you, Ellice (he produced three parcels from his coat pocket): I assure you it's the hardest and most incomprehensible Chapell could find, so I hope it'll please you

Knowing your taste of old, Vanda, I brought you a French novel."

Miss Montacute looked annoyed. "I wish, Jack, you——"

"Now I know all you're going to say, Ellice, beforehand; but you need not be alarmed, for Phil, who is a model of propriety, recommended it. I asked him, not being strong at French myself, and he said it was a stunning book."

"That I am sure he didn't," laughed Miss Montacute. "What is it called?"

"'Madame de—Bonneval.' Don't laugh at my pronunciation. There, Linda, is something less intellectual for you."

He put a little morocco case into her hand, stooping down as he did so.

"And now I must——"

"Stop, Jack, a minute," said the Admiral, rising; "I want to say a word to you, my boy."

He put his arm within the young man's, and walked down the garden with him.

A less welcome visitor, I suspect, appeared at that moment. The garden-gate opened and Miss Halliday entered.

“How d’ye do, dear Ellice! Good evening, Mr. Esdaile. I was passing, and thought, as I have so seldom time to come and see you in the morning, that I would just drop in to let you know that the Ashfords are expected down here almost immediately.”

“Really?” said Miss Montacute in the most uninterested tone.

“Yes. We heard from Clemmy this afternoon, and they all leave town on the seventh. And—isn’t it a bore, dear?—they have got a large party, as I expected, at the castle the week after, for the races.”

“Indeed!” replied Miss Montacute, as before.

“Their cousins, the Roley Poleys, are coming, and young Lord Dumpling, and several sporting men Clemmy mentions; and that handsome Count Bismark who was here last year.”

As Miss Halliday spoke my eyes happened to rest upon the lovely Vanda, looking with unusual eagerness towards the speaker, and veiling her eyes the next instant under those long dark lashes. Her eldest sister, if I am not mistaken, shot a quick glance towards her, but except a slight flush over Miss Vanda’s cheek, that

young lady's face was as impervious as ever again.

"I am sorry, Kate," said Miss Montacute, "for I suppose your mother will urge your going to the Race-ball, which you detest, I know. As to us, it does not make much difference," she added in a marked manner, "for we cannot afford to go to public balls."

"I shall go," said Miss Vanda, without raising her eyes, "for Papa has promised to take me."

The Admiral and Jack rejoined the group just then. The latter stooped down again, and whispered into Miss Linda's ear; then wished us good-bye. When I rose to take my leave a few minutes after, Miss Halliday asked me to see her home, as "though the neighbourhood is very quiet, the lanes are so dark." She was extremely kind and friendly in her manner, assured me I had been of great benefit to her, begged I would tell her of all her faults, and reproached me with not coming oftener to see them. She kept me several minutes talking at the cottage-gate, and as the moon came out from behind a cloud and shone on her fair face, I

thought her really a most attractive person : much more so than I had ever done before.

One of my two facts is, of course, the return of the Ashford family : the other you will have been at no loss to discover. Linda Montacute is evidently engaged to Jack Stapylton : it must have been this to which the Colonel so slyly referred the other day ; but I suppose the engagement is still a secret, and I should very much doubt the Squire giving his consent. Good night, my dear Mary : write soon to your loving brother.

III.

August 2.

I resume my journal five days later. If it be sometimes rather *introspective* than a record of outward events, remember that I try to bring you as near me in my new life as I can, and that it is not always a record of outward events that will do this. I want you to have part in the thoughts and struggles of my own mind at the moment I write: just as I note down the trivial conversations, the many little conceits and follies that have impressed me during the day. The history of any thinking mind, were it minutely and honestly written, would be more instructive than whole volumes of history. “C’est dans les profondeurs de l’homme invisible, que se passent les événements heureux ou malheureux de la vie,” says Victor Cousin. The perplexities of

my duty here oppress me so much at times (to-day, especially, I have been feeling this), that I ask myself whether I have not mistaken my calling—whether I am strong enough for the “care of the churches” that I have undertaken? It is common, particularly by the devout, to regard clergymen as a sort of superior beings, elevated above the weaknesses incident to the flesh. I, at least, feel that I am stumbling forwards upon the same narrow, thorny path with the very weakest of my brothers. If any one of them saw into my heart, would he not ask, “who art thou that preachest unto us?” I feel almost as though I were guilty of hypocrisy when doubts and difficulties arise within me, as they sometimes do: but a voice answers that, He who judges not as man judges, knows that with many inconsistencies and failings, passion, and weakness, and error, I am earnest in my wish to diffuse a more liberal faith on earth, a larger charity, and greater love for Him. But I am often discouraged, Mary.

Religious party feeling runs very high here: there is a small nest of Roman Catholics (principally Irish labourers) who have no chapel, but

are visited by a priest from Dominster. There are dissenters of every denomination, a high and a low church party, and many, alas! of no church at all, like John Hurst. The acrimony existing between all these, Mr. Brigstock has done very little to allay. Some of the parishioners blend their politics and their religion together. The Ashford Arms is Tory and High Church; the Sun, Radical and Ana-Baptist. Even in our congregation this contentious spirit manifests itself between the churchwardens and some of the pew-holders: a perpetual and unseemly struggle is going on about rights and privileges. In the school the numbers, proportionately to the parish, are very few, owing to the same feeling. Many of the parents seem to think they confer a favor on *us*, by sending their children; and some who have fallen justly under the Rector's censure, I am afraid in the belief that they inflict some personal injury on *him*, have removed their children to the care of a dissenting pedagogue, who charges twopence a week more. This is disheartening. So are the endless quarrels and bitternesses engendered throughout the parish by the intolerant

spirit I have already spoken of. When the Rector set up a rival to Mr. Nacker, the old-established butcher here, because the latter seceded to the Dissenters, was it to be wondered at if Mrs. Jones over the way, and the head of the "Chapel" party, withdrew her custom from Mr. Crump, the orthodox baker? or that the chemist is not on speaking terms with his next-door-neighbour, the chandler, for the same reason. As to the poor Romanists, they meet with scornful usage on all sides, and the priest runs a risk of being insulted every time he comes over here. Seeing which things I have resolved to try what my words from the pulpit can do to lead these people to a more tolerant frame of mind. Mr. Brigstock cannot surely object to this, though the doctrine is one he never inculcates. I am to preach next Sunday morning (I have only done so in the evening hitherto); and as the Ashford family will have arrived, in which are several foreign Romanist servants I am told, the opportunity for such a discourse will be a favourable one.

Who says that manner is unimportant? In certain positions, I believe it to be of the gravest

consequence. Whether I possess the “cunning” to wind round men’s hearts, the power to impress them with the truth of my teaching, to make them look on me as a friend, and on my coming as a pleasure, instead of a necessary bore to be endured — this I sometimes doubt. Yet, without this special grace, were I never so gifted, it is difficult to make any way. I am met by such stubborn ignorance and obduracy. The words of my predecessor — an easy-going young man, who thought the world was well enough as he found it — are quoted against me when I attempt any reform. He was better liked than I shall probably ever be.

August 4th.—I dined at Stapylton Manor last night. The only other guests were Mr. Forsepp, his wife, and daughter, whom I was somewhat surprised to meet, considering the terms in which Mrs. Stapylton alluded to them ten days ago. They are quiet, soberly-conducted people: the lady, unremarkable in any way; the father, probably a man of good sense, awed into silence by his extreme deference to Mrs. Stapylton. He got on much better with the

Squire after dinner ; and I gathered that it was the first time he had dined there. The daughter, their only child, is rather pretty, expensively dressed, and much frightened. This is the only impression they made on me, except a feeling of profound pity for mother and daughter, when they retired with Mrs. Stapylton after dinner. What agonies they must have endured in that lady's society before we joined them !

The Squire is a fine specimen of the old sportsman,—rubicund, somewhat irascible, with keen, quick eyes, a benevolent brow, and weak mouth ; loud in his laugh, and long in his story of horse or hound ; but every now and then appearing oppressed by some secret care that obtruded itself,—possibly Mrs. Stapylton's curtain lecture. His manner to his two sons—they were both at dinner—was very different. To Philip he hardly spoke. Jack he constantly appealed to on some point or other, and seemed to derive immense satisfaction from the young man's jokes. His brother, as you will guess, was, of all present, the person about whom I had the most curiosity : we fraternised at once. He is one of the few men towards whom I

have felt impelled by a strong sympathy on first acquaintance; and, after calling it a "sympathy," you will hardly expect me to give you a more satisfactory reason, unless it be that we are completely unlike each other,—unlike in character, unlike by education, though with natural tastes in common; but he is an accomplished man in the most extended sense. These natural tastes with him have been highly cultivated, while with me they remain little more than instincts. I know, indeed, something of music, and for that I have to thank you; but while I was poring over Hebrew and divinity at Oxford, Philip Stapylton was acquiring a thorough knowledge, not only of that science, but of many others, concerning which I am profoundly ignorant. He is fond of astronomy, and on the top of his old tower here he has a fine glass, where he sometimes spends half the night in taking observations. He is, moreover, a man of varied reading in curious by-paths of literature, has a valuable collection of rare books, and studies languages of which I could not read a letter, though I suppose I should beat him at Aristotle or Demosthenes.

All this, and something more besides, I discovered only through *fissures* in his talk; for he is not demonstrative of himself or his acquirements. Indeed, until after dinner, when the other three gentlemen got upon the state of the crops, and Philip turned to me, he scarcely spoke, though we sat next each other.

His other neighbour was Miss Forsepp, and, I am sorry to say, he was not more communicative to her. He threw her into a violent agitation once by abruptly asking her whether she was fond of flowers? She was so confused, that she answered hurriedly, "With great pleasure;" after which effort, Philip gave her up, and relapsed again into silence. Mrs. Stapylton seemed annoyed, and made several stately efforts to bring back her son into the fold of conversation. He was perfectly respectful in his manner to his mother; but he evidently neither took, nor would pretend to take, any interest in what went forward. As soon as we entered the drawing-room after dinner, Mrs. Stapylton asked Miss Forsepp to play something. The poor young woman begged to be

excused: "She really——" but her mamma mildly interposed.

"Don't be nervous, my dear; just go and play *your piece*."

That prepared me for what was to follow. The victim rustled to the piano, and tore her gloves in the trembling effort to get them off her little red hands, while Jack opened the instrument, and good-naturedly tried to re-assure her. Then came a so-called "brilliant morceau." Whatever it might have been at a less agitating moment, it now resembled nothing so much as a bag of nails dropped promiscuously over the keys. Jingle—jingle—jingle—bur-r-r. I stole a look towards Philip: he turned over the leaves of a book impatiently; and Mrs. Stapylton was very gracious and complimentary when the young lady rose. Jack kindly undertook her for the remainder of the evening, and it was surprising how much more at ease she soon became. I heard fragments of "race ball—my first—except one in London at the Hanover Square Rooms—Mrs. Alderman Moon took me—so pleasant—I hope," etc., etc. Then from the two matrons I caught this characteristic

colloquy. Mrs. Stapylton tapping with an ivory paper-knife the open "Livingstone," on the table,

"You have read this remarkable book, I presume? Does your daughter read much?"

"My daughter went through all the standard works with her governess, and we read a portion every day. If you recommend that book, Ma'am, for a young person, I will procure it."

"I shall be happy to lend it you, Mrs. Forsepp," said the other lady with amazing condescension.

Where can all this lead, I thought? but a name just then caught me from the other side of the room, and I turned to where the Squire, Philip, and Mr. Forsepp were discussing matters connected with the Reformatory.

"Three more applications from the neighbouring county; that makes fourteen, and only one vacancy. We must give the preference to our own county first, of course. I hope this young scamp, Sam Timson, is not beyond the age, Mr. Forsepp."

"Sam Timson," I asked, "what has he been doing?"

“Ah! by-the-bye: yes, Mr. Esdaile, the boy you saved from drowning t’other day. I’m glad—sorry, I mean—to tell you he has been apprehended this afternoon on a charge of sheep-stealing. No doubt, I’m afraid, of his complicity. He will be brought before us to-morrow: I hope he ain’t sixteen; fine subject for the Reformatory,” said the Squire, rubbing his hands; “a strong muscular lad with plenty of pluck and intelligence.”

“Pity he’s not a *leetle* younger,” remarked Mr. Forsepp.

I was rather vexed at the professional way in which these good gentlemen spoke; more like hospital students in a dissecting room than philanthropists; and I said,

“It is a sad business. The father has a large family, and this boy was beginning to assist him and earn something towards his own support. Besides every other consideration, the disgrace attaching to one of the family will be a great drawback to them all in Ashford.”

“The happiest thing that could happen to the boy, Mr. Esdaile. Gad, sir! I’d be bound he can’t read or write: and if he is sharp we’ll

teach him a trade by which he can earn as many shillings as he now does pence as a hedger and ditcher."

There was a good deal more of the same sort, and soon after I wished Mrs. Stapylton good night. Philip walked with me to the hall door and stood on the step, looking out into the clear starlight.

"I should like to walk back with you, Mr. Esdaile, but my father will expect me to remain as long as those people do. I hope we may meet often. Of an evening sometimes, after your day's work is done, we might have a stroll perhaps. I shall always be glad to see you. I know at once when a man will suit me, and it isn't often, for I am an unsociable beast, as you see. Good night."

I see you shake your little head, Mary, as you read this, and declare that my new friend is conceited, Werther-ish, and disagreeable. Now do not judge too hastily. I promise to tell you fairly all I think of him as our acquaintance progresses: it is not yet four-and-twenty hours old.

This morning my first visit was to John

Hurst's cottage. The sweet peas are now tied up to the wall: the fowls no longer walk over the patch of flowers, but are fenced out securely by a trellis of twigs that has been put into thorough repair since I was here last. John was sawing some wood. I had not seen him occupied since the child's death, and I thought it a good sign. When I spoke he looked up, put his hand to his cap and went on sawing. After asking for his wife, who was out, I said,

"I suppose, John, you have heard this bad news about young Sam Timson?—taken up on a charge of sheep stealing."

"I'm glad on it," said John, curtly, "sarve him right."

"No, no: come, you're not glad at a neighbour's misfortune: and it is a very heavy one, too. The other day you quoted Timson as an instance of a man with whom everything prospered: all his children alive and well. I told you that God sends us trials and blessings as He sees fit,—not as we judge best at the time. What do you say now? Sam is a hard worldly man. With his seven children, he would not have felt the death of one as he will the shame of

having a son who is a felon. It will cling round him and his through life : it may prevent his ever getting employment. This is the hardest trial to such a nature as Timson's. Let us hope it may be the means of making him more careful in bringing up his other children."

John looked up into my face with an expression it is impossible to describe,— .

"I'd have kept *my* little 'un straight, if he'd bin left me."

I said, after a moment, "There is one still left you to take care of,— your wife, John. Remember all she suffered in bringing that child into the world, and try to comfort her, in her mother's sorrow, as a man should. God will not believe that you would have proved a careful father, if he sees you a careless husband."

The entrance of Mrs. Hurst, looking so worn and wan that it made my heart ache to see the change in her, put a stop to our conversation. As I passed through the churchyard an hour afterwards, I saw, by what in this country is an unusual sight, that the poor woman had been there : on the little grave, in its quiet corner, lay a bunch of bluebells and sweetpeas.

August 7th.—This is a glorious morning, after three days' heavy rain, and my spirits (which I find it very difficult to keep at a proper equipoise) are unusually high; so forgive any incoherences.

I began the day well, with your letter and a plate of cherries. I was as much amused with the excellent description you give of *your* life and the society of the Saxon court, as I was interested in your comments on *mine*. But what, my dear Mary, can have put that absurd idea into your head about Miss Halliday? You have veered round in your estimate of that young lady, from some inadvertent phrases in my last letter, I suppose: at all events, nothing can be more ridiculous than to imagine she has any "designs" on your poor curate brother. Ridiculous and unjust! for my office warrants—nay, demands—that I shall see more of the female portion of my congregation than I should in any other position. The candour that appeals for guidance and counsel, the confidence that unbosoms itself to me, in my pastoral character, must never be misinterpreted. Your jealous regard for my welfare, Mary, perhaps your fears for my impressionable heart, have

deceived you. Nothing is further from Miss Halliday's thoughts than to marry a man in the receipt of less than three hundred a year, and without "interest" or "expectations!" You are more just to the Montacute family, when you say that "these young ladies, at all events, are not liable to a similar accusation; for of the two who are *unabsorbed*, one is silent and the other sulky." I begin to suspect that the latter is also *absorbed*, which may account for her singular bearing and manner, the malady showing itself in various ways. I have perhaps wrongly conveyed to you the impression that Miss Montacute is silent; her words, indeed, are few, and I have found it difficult to recal them exactly, because they have seldom been more than lightly-scattered seeds of talk over a rich and thoughtful soil. Though there is but two years difference between each of the sisters, Miss Montacute has the weight of almost maternal authority over her second sister, and a maturity of judgment that does not, unfortunately, always come with maternity. Not so with the youngest. I think something must have occurred to estrange her from her eldest

sister, though Ellice—as I shall now call her—never shows by her manner that such is the case. She is constantly endeavouring to rouse Vanda to some healthy vigorous interest, but without success. The latter never accompanies her sisters to their singing class, or to the Sunday school, and seldom, indeed, goes beyond the precincts of the garden. Her father is doatingly fond of her, and I believe she returns his affection; but the young lady is an enigma to me, and so probably will always remain, as our intercourse is of the very slightest. Linda and her eldest sister are sincerely attached to each other, I am sure. There is no mistaking the whole look and tone that subsists between two women whose hearts are open to each other and closely knit. Still I cannot help fancying that Linda's engagement—if engagement it be—to Jack Stapylton, is against Ellice's wish and advice. I gather this from something she said the other day relative to "long engagements." The conversation took place in a walk, and Linda was present. It was on this wise: the two sisters had been visiting some poor woman, when I overtook

them on the road. Linda inquired almost immediately how the party at Stapylton Hall the evening before had "come off?"

"It *dropped* off," I replied. "There was no party but the Forsepps family, who are not lively, as Mr. Philip Stapylton seemed to think, though I have no doubt they are excellent charitable people."

"But that is not the essential quality at a dinner?" smiled Miss Montacute. "I expected a more moral sentiment from you than that, Mr. Esdaile."

"So the Forsepps dined there?" repeated Linda. "How very odd! no wonder they asked no one else. After all Mrs. Stapylton has said about them, she could hardly have asked any of the 'County' she talks of to meet them. Poor people! they must have been quite uncomfortable, being the first time, and so out of their own element."

"Yes; but Mr. Jack good-naturedly took pity upon the young lady, and before the evening was over, I assure you he had quite succeeded in putting her at her ease."

"Indeed? She is a very pretty girl," ob-

served Linda; then added dryly, "I suppose, as Jack would say, his lady-mother 'put her through her paces,'—music, literature, etc., etc.; we have all been through it in our time."

"And very creditably, no doubt," said I, smiling.

"I am afraid not," replied Ellice: "we had just come from abroad when Mrs. Stapylton used to catechise us so much. I was fourteen at the time, and shamefully ignorant of modern English literature. I had read the 'Waverley Novels' to please myself, and James's 'Naval History' to please my father, and that was all, except Shakespeare and some of the old poets; but these Mrs. Stapylton, I believe, thought worse than nothing. Of Hume and Gibbon I had never read a word: that was an unpardonable offence in her eyes."

"And does she still continue to supervise your reading, Miss Montacute?"

"We see very little of Mrs. Stapylton *now*; and I am afraid my reading is as desultory as ever."

"What kind of books do you prefer?"

"I like everything with a human interest,

that lays bare the springs of human conduct ; the conduct itself I care less about. By that, I mean history, the dry history of facts, though I delight in biographies and memoirs, such as as George Stephenson's, for instance. I know nothing about steam and machinery ; but the story of that man's indomitable will and energy until crowned with success, deeply interested me."

"Then I suppose you do not care for novels."

"Why not? Nothing I like so much as a novel that I can believe to be true. And it is true, if it stands this test, though the facts may be fictitious. There is that higher truth of *human nature*, which common-place novels are perpetually violating ; for the rest, nothing is too improbable for the experience of everyday life, I think."

Thereupon we fell to discussing several novels, and their claims to this primary merit : at last I named * * * *, and asked Miss Montacute whether she had read it ?

"Yes, and a true, though sad, little book it is."

"I hate books that take that gloomy view of life," said Linda.

"It is not a gloomy view of *life*," replied her sister. "It is only the gloomy view of an *act* which is common enough,—a long engagement."

"What?" said Linda with a heightened colour; "are trust and fidelity so obsolete, that two people must no longer undertake to be constant to each other for longer than just the necessary time to get the marriage certificate? If so, I wish the old times back when a true knight fought year after year with his lady's colours on his lance, while she sat in her tower and watched for his return."

"Yet even in those model times," said I, "the knight occasionally changed the colours on his lance, or returned to find the lady consoled in her tower."

"Linda forgets that the fidelity of chivalry was often a *thought* unexpressed in words,—a life-long dedication unshackled by vows. Who cares for the constancy that is dependent on a vow? Is it not more natural, when circumstances prevent the present possibility of a marriage, that both parties should be free?"

"Yes," I observed, "there is in reality less

security immediately honour enters into a compact that should be purely one of the heart. But, after all, desertion would be as keenly felt either way. The woman must feel proud who inspired Philip Stapylton with a passion that has suffered neither change nor decay through so many years."

"And she herself married four years ago."

"Poor fellow! I had not heard that. Do you know him well?"

"No one now, I suppose, knows him *well*—no woman certainly. When we meet we discuss German books, and to me, at least, he is always agreeable and kind: but I very seldom see him."

"The more's the pity. I shall do all I can to rouse him from this morbid state."

"And you will fail."

This, as far as I can recollect it, was the substance of our conversation. And it was noticeable that Linda, after that one little burst relapsed into silence, and allowed her sister and me to talk on uncontradicted. It would not be difficult, I apprehend, to find out exactly how the affair stands between Jack and herself, seeing that the element of gossip is not

wanting here more than in any other village in the British dominions; and that Miss Tarra-
gon rated me soundly in the street yesterday for the quantity of butchers' meat that had been seen to enter my door during the week. (N.B. For you *alone*, and lest you should think I am wallowing in the flesh-pots of Egypt, there is an almost destitute family living close to me, which from certain circumstances do not receive the parish bounty; so "what the Abbot of Bamba cannot eat, he gives away for the good of his soul.") Therefore, to return to Linda's love affairs, I know that the smallest encouragement on my part would bring the story about my ears, with every detail of what the Squire said, and how Mrs. Stapylton behaved, and what Jack replied, and how the matter finally stands: above all what everybody ought to have done and didn't do, and how improper the whole business is. But I ask no questions, and shall never do so about my neighbours' private concerns, except when I see a prospect of being of some service.

Monday, August 9.—This morning Mr. Brigstock sent for me. I had not seen him since

the morning service yesterday, as he had done duty in the afternoon in a neighbouring parish. He pushed back his spectacles loftily and shut the book he was reading with a loud report as I entered the study—unmistakeable tokens of displeasure in the worthy gentleman.

“Be seated Mr. Esdaile. I regret the necessity that compels me to speak as I am about to do. During the short time that you have performed the duties of curate in this parish I have found you an industrious young man—somewhat enthusiastic perhaps, but well-meaning. I have thought favourably of you. I have ventured to hope that, when years should give force to your character and soundness to your judgment, you might prove an ornament to the Church. How, then, shall I express my sorrow and surprise at the tone of the sermon you thought fit to deliver in my church yesterday morning? I was shocked, sir, grievously shocked. What will my parishioners say to such lax doctrine? and what have *you* to say, sir?”

“That I am sorry if anything in my sermon displeased you, Mr. Brigstock. Perhaps you

would be good enough to point out to me what it was?"

"What it was! Can you affect to be ignorant that the whole tone of it was subversive of all Church discipline: all unity, all—all——"

"Pardon me, but I must indeed disclaim any such intention. You misunderstood my meaning, sir, which was to widen the sphere of unity, rather than destroy it; to soften those asperities that prevent men of different shades of feeling from seeing how much nearer they really are to each other than they imagine. And it was from the lamentable divisions in this parish that I was induced to speak as I did."

"Exactly, sir: I have no doubt of it. This truckling to popular opinion, this wishing to be 'all things to all men' is the stumbling-block of such as use these sophistical arguments. To palliate the sinfulness of schism, to explain away the bulwarks of orthodoxy and conciliate different *shades* of opinion, as you term it; this, sir, is not the teaching the Church looks for at the hands of her priesthood. This is weakness—the weakness of Aaron who listened to the voice of the people, Mr. Esdaile."

“I hope not, sir. Here is the sermon”—I drew it from my pocket: “Show me a passage that will justify your interpretation, and I shall with sorrow confess myself wrong. The great lesson of forbearance and charity, long-suffering and brotherly good-will, taught us by Christ himself, and superseding the fierce intolerance of the Mosaic law, these I have sought to inculcate; and are they never to be preached in your church, sir?”

The Rector held out his hand for the sermon.

“This is mere trifling, Mr. Esdaile. As I said before, sir, your doctrine is weak—effeminately weak. . . . Why,” he added, turning over the leaves of my discourse, “here you actually speak with—with consideration, with *charity* of the corrupt Church of Rome. ‘Did we but regard them,’ you say, ‘in a right spirit, we should find, with all their errors, much that is high and admirable; much that is worthy of imitation in many members of that church.’ Here is a sentiment to be delivered to a Protestant congregation. Are you aware, Mr. Esdaile, that Sir Richard Ashford, the patron of this living, with all his family were

present? What must have been his feelings? —a staunch Protestant—an upholder of Church and State, as Sir Richard has ever shown himself, in Parliament and elsewhere! Let me hope, at least, that you were not aware of his presence, Mr. Esdaile, when you made this unseemly display.”

I could hardly avoid smiling at the *naiveté* of the Rector’s speech, but I replied gravely,

“It was because the Ashford family were at church that I said what I did about Romanism, as I learnt that many of their servants were foreigners and of that persuasion. Religious discords are worse than any other, and in a family must be productive of many evils. Come, Mr. Brigstock, acquit me of schismatic tendencies, when I assure you that in all I said I was prompted solely by the desire to make men think less ill of each other and more humbly of themselves.”

“You cannot preach again in my church, Mr. Esdaile, giving utterance to these dangerous doctrines. I shall communicate with Sir Richard on the subject, and I hope that your youth and inexperience may induce him to take a

lenient view of the case: but you must modify your views, sir, otherwise——”

“I cannot hold out any prospect of altering them, Mr. Brigstock, since——”

“That will do, sir;” the Rector waved his hand to prevent further discussion. “You will think over what I have said, and your good sense will lead you to see the justice of it, I am sure. Good morning.”

To speak honestly and without false modesty, the Rector finds me more useful to him than any other curate he has had; otherwise, I should have received my dismissal there and then. As it is, I suppose my continuing here will depend in a measure on what the Baronet says of me and my discourse. What manner of man is this, the only one on earth of whom the Rector stands in awe? I observed a tall spare gentleman, who, together with a young man and two fashionably dressed ladies, occupied the Ashford pew in church; beyond this, I know nothing as yet of Sir Richard Ashford. I shall be very sorry if I am obliged to leave just as I have been sufficiently long here to become interested in this parish; but

I cannot regret having spoken as I did, still less can I take a step backward. So I commend myself and you, and all we love, to Him who knows what is good for us, and who ordereth "all things well." Good night.

IV.

August 11.

LET me terminate your suspense at once. I am not to leave Ashford. The Rector and I had another conversation to-day, which I will not inflict on you; suffice it that he was mollified. But this conversation was preceded by a little scene which I must not omit, for it introduced me to four most distinguished personages. I was hurrying up the street, feeling and looking, no doubt, very hot, with a bundle of school tracts under my arm, when I observed the Rector standing with two gentlemen outside the post-office. He beckoned with his bony fore-finger to me; but before I reached the group, I had ample time to observe the general appearance of the two strangers. The elder one had just torn open the *Times*, which stood

on end in its fresh creases between his outspread arms, while he dived to the bottom of a column for some particular article, his hat tilted over his eyes as a sunshade. He wore an inordinately high blue stock, and his very thin legs were clad in tight fawn-coloured trousers, with straps. I name all this because it was such a contrast to the younger gentleman's attire. A shirt powdered with forget-me-nots, wide open at the throat, a riband and a ring, a straw hat trimmed with sky-blue, and a suit of some gossamer material, the lower portions of which resembled in form those leg-of-mutton sleeves our mammas used once to wear. With this, a fair curly-moustached face, from which all human expression had been clean sponged out.

“Mr. Esdaile, Sir Richard Ashford has been kind enough to request that I would present you to him: Mr. Esdaile, Sir Richard Ashford—Mr. Ashford, Mr. Esdaile.”

“Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Esdaile, very happy. Gratified by your sensible discourse on Sunday—sensible, very sensible. ‘Live and let live,’ that is the maxim

of the age, and we must move *with* the age, sir. No sacrifice of High Church principle, of course; but you are right, sir, right. The Jewish Disabilities Bill, you see, has passed; one spoke against it in the House—that is a matter of trade; and you were bold, sir, to say what you did from the pulpit, calculated to offend our eminently Christian constituents here, who hate each other's creeds like poison—ha! ha! But you were right, sir, right: I applaud you. As a man of the world, what difference does it make, as I was just saying to our excellent friend the Rector, if they are all Mahomedans or Hindoos?"

"Some difference, I hope, Sir Richard. It is because I don't think any conversion was ever effected by bitterness and recrimination, that I braved the Ashford lion—of discord—in its den."

"Have a weed?" said the young man, languidly holding out an embroidered cigar-case.

"I never smoke, thank you."

"That is right, Mr. Esdaile, quite right," said the Baronet; "I wish you could prevail on that youngster to follow your wise example.

One of the growing follies of the age, sir. When I was a young man, 'twas comparatively rare. As an illustrious personage remarked to me the other day——”

But it was fated that we should lose the remark of the illustrious personage, for Miss Taragon, striding out of the shop at that moment, brought confusion into our ranks. She shook hands with the Baronet, then turned sharply round to his son.

“God bless me! Dick Ashford, what *do* you mean by making such a guy of yourself? Did any one ever see such an absurd object?” (Rector much shocked.) “Your mother always did dress you ridiculously as a child, when you used to come down and have strawberries and cream in my garden; but really this beats—— I say, Sir Richard, why don't you make him dress like a Christian?”

“Ah, my dear ma'am, right, quite right; what I am always telling him,—very absurd, very—new school—young England—all alike! Look at my dress, as I say; but anything that is neat these young fellows call old-fashioned—*arriéré*.”

“Folly!” ejaculated Miss Tarragon, but whether at father or son was not clear, until she added, “why must you follow all the young jackanapes in London, Master Dick? You are not—that is, you *were* not a year or two ago, when you left Eton, such a goose as you look now.”

The young man smiled good-naturedly and bowed, which raised him in my estimation.

The lady continued, “By-the-bye, Sir Richard, I called on Lady Caroline yesterday and saw your new geranium garden. Very badly done! Shocking gardener that of yours! Why, *my* show in my very humble way is twice as good. It is positively a shame, with ten gardeners and spending all you do on your garden!”

“Ha! no doubt—I dare say—sorry, my dear Miss Tarragon, but ’tis all Lady Caroline’s affair. Dare say he *is* a rogue and a cheat—no doubt of it; but as long as I have my pines and peaches I never interfere—never.”

“But you ought to interfere. Turn him away. I’ll get you twice as good a one. I should like to see anyone attempting to cheat *me*. Which reminds me, Mr. Esdaile, that *you*

have been most egregiously taken in about that woman Brown—no more starving than I am, sir: and those Jones's you have been assisting are not much better than they should be, let me tell you, though they *do* come to second service. There is Lady Caroline's carriage. Good gracious! what a parasol! Well, I can't stop: I've fifty things to do before dinner. Good morning, Sir Richard," and greatly to the relief of everyone the Amazon departed.

A barouche, with blue and silver servants, drove down the street at the same moment: it drew up at a sign from Sir Richard. He presented me to Lady Caroline and his daughter, who lay almost at full length inside in a cloud of muslin and lace. They seemed to have barely strength to raise their heads and incline them gracefully; then sank back exhausted. Miss Ashford is a young repetition of her mother, who has been a pretty woman, but with none of the enduring qualities of beauty, and looks now much worn with her hard fashionable life. The daughter herself has already lost the freshness and elasticity that should belong to youth. She had about as much color

as the white parasol she held in her hand, and seemed as weak as the fringe surrounding it. The expression of her face is gentle and vapid. Knowing nothing of London life, I imagine that all its young ladies look thus.

“Ministers were very shaky, Caroline,” said the Baronet.

“Oh! I suppose the paper has Lady Julia’s marriage in it? Are you coming with us? —a round of duty visits, you know. Horrid bore, but you really *ought* to come, and Richard also. With the chance of an election——”

“Duty! duty! Ha! Mr. Esdaile, what we suffer for our country? May I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you at dinner on Friday? Half-past seven. Good morning. Come, Dick, you must sacrifice yourself for once, sir.”

And Sir Richard jumped nimbly into the carriage, followed much more languidly by his son.

Then, as the Rector and I walked together to the school, followed that satisfactory conversation of which I have given you the result. I cannot suppose that Mr. Brigstock’s own opinion is changed, but he has become more

lenient to mine since he found the patron sails trimmed to toleration. Nor must you judge the good man too hardly on this account. Sir Richard is looked upon as an universal oracle here: the small place he held under the late Government increased his importance immensely among the Ashfordians, and it would require a stronger head than the Rector's to withstand the influence of the Baronet's opinion when he talks of "political expediency," and the necessity of "moving with the times." So, contenting himself with a long exordium, and cautioning me not to venture again on such a dangerous subject (as universal charity), the Rector parted from me not unkindly.

I have walked with Philip Stapylton several times, and the more I see of him the more I feel that we are likely to become fast friends. It is a trite remark, that those who have few, care more for them than the liberal hearts who entertain an unlimited number, in their large capacity of attachment. Like all sweeping observations this is open to discussion, and is certainly not universally true: but, leading the peculiar life that Stapylton does, it is natural

to suppose that in going out of his way to cultivate my acquaintance, he is actuated by something stronger than curiosity. Far cleverer, far more learned and brilliant society in London and at the University, he shunned: why should he seek mine? Is it because the 'objective' turn of my mind, opposed to the 'subjective' turn of his, as he would probably term it, strikes out—it may be no more than a spark, yet—something of new light and fire? I know not.

This afternoon Philip called as I was getting my fishing-tackle ready for an hour's stroll along the stream, before the sun went down. We walked together to a part of the river where it narrows and deepens, and where, from under the far-down pebbles, the speckled phantom of a trout glided ever and anon slowly beneath the deep still water. Philip threw himself on the bank, and I took my stand in the shadow of some alders, on the other side of which a sudden bend brought the high-road close to the river. We were effectually screened from the passers-by, though from where I stood I could see them between the branches. Our talk was desultory: of books and abstract questions

rather than of men, as it generally is between us, and the only portion of it which had anything of a personal character was brought about by hearing the clatter of horses' feet on the road at our backs. I observed to Philip that it was Mr. Forsepp and his daughter, accompanied by Jack, who seemed to be on quite intimate terms with them now. They were all laughing very merrily, and the young lady looked to particular advantage on a thorough-bred chesnut, which she managed to perfection.

"If your brother continues making himself so agreeable," said I, smiling, "it will be dangerous to that poor girl's peace of mind. Listen to her laugh. She seems to have forgotten that she ever was, or could be, shy and silent."

"It is a way Jack has with women. He doesn't mean anything by it. His warm heart expands at once under the sunshine of a woman's smile, and closes again as soon as it is withdrawn."

"Always?"

"I hardly know yet: I hope not. It is a

pity he is not allowed to marry the only girl he has shown any strength and length of attachment to. I have said all I could to my father about it; and though generally Jack can do anything with him he likes, my mother's influence was so strong, and her prejudice so violent against these Montacutes, that——”

“Why, except their being penniless, what objection is there to the poor girls?”

“Their mother, I believe, was not a good character—at least so Mrs. Stapylton always says—and she calls these girls ‘vulgar,’ which is the more absurd as she patronised them very much until Jack returned from college and fell in love with Linda. Then it was she made a discovery of all their imperfections, and not till then. O world! world! There is nothing so vulgar, by-the-bye, as the outcry of vulgarity. It is the only word that carries a particular ban with it, easy to lay any one under, and almost impossible to be released from.”

“Yes,” said I, laughing; “for if you say that a man is a bad husband or father, one may reply that one doesn't believe it, that the world is scandalous, etc.; but when you pro-

nounce this sentence on him, who dares say nay? One's own delicacy of perception in nice social distinctions is challenged; one shrinks from avowing that the man does not seem to one vulgar. I have been often surprised to see the most good-natured people silenced when this charge has been preferred."

"For my part, I think nothing can be very vulgar which is simple and unpretentious; but this is rarer than an aptitude for the received usages of good society. It isn't uncommon in the peasant's cottage,—that quiet dignity, with a manner at once unassuming and self-possessed. A little higher in the social scale, as we approach the skirts of 'gentility,' this is much rarer. The lady's maid and the haberdasher's 'lady' seldom have it, for they are often pretentious, striving after and apeing something they are not; and all shams are vulgar. The Forseppts, in the main, are quiet unassuming people. The damsel's dress and her accomplishments, however, are outrageous vulgarisms, as I told Mrs. Stapylton that night after their departure."

"Come, you are too severe: only venial follies to smile kindly at. Remember, they were all

trying to do their very best in a society that was strange to them ; and when people are on their best behaviour, they seldom appear to advantage. What did Mrs. Stapylton think of them ?”

“For some good reason of her own, she chose to defend them. I had to stand an attack of more than usual severity on my boorishness.”

“And you deserved it. Why not play your part, Stapylton, in the give and take of society more cheerfully ? By rubbing against even the most ordinary natures, you may learn something more valuable, perhaps, than you would have acquired in the silence of your closet.”

“I doubt it, for they give me nothing of themselves, only a jargon of conventionalities, which bores me : I speak of general society. Any one that is earnest and true, ‘loyal to fact,’ as Carlyle would say, however illiterate or unrefined, has the power of arresting my attention, of interesting me. I can show him some portion of myself. With the rest, my talk, if I talk at all, is a sham ; and I agree with old Montaigne,—‘*De combien est le langage faux moins sociable que le silence !*’

Life is too short for it, Esdaile, or I am too lazy."

"Intellectual selfishness, my dear fellow. Remember what your favourite Goëthe says :

“ ‘ Es bildet ein talent sich in der Stille,
Sich ein charakter in dem Strom der Welt.’

"And just because your inclination leads you to solitude and self culture, you should fight against indulging it too much. Depend on it, we weren't put into this world to sit down and hug our own conceits, and talk of 'shams,' and fancy ourselves vastly superior to our neighbours. Granted that they understand but little of your inner world, what does that signify to you? They can't bring their shams in there. Let them see that there is heartiness and reality in you, show them that you feel an interest in what lies under their 'jargon of conventionalities,' and you will seldom fail to draw out something worth attention, except in the most surface natures. These Forsepps, for instance, what do you know of them beyond the fact that their wealth does not sit as easily and gracefully on them as on the old Patrician

families to whom it comes as a matter of course? Have you ever taken the pains, my dear Stapylton, to discover what qualities have raised old Forsepp to the respectable and respected position he now holds, from a very inferior one? A man who builds up a colossal fortune, not by fortunate speculation, but by industry and energetic will, depend on it, is no very ordinary man after all."

Philip replied, after a short pause, "He has a capital head for business—that of course—and is a good-hearted man: in the management of our Reformatory affairs he is invaluable; but any one who has made money the aim and God of his life, could never interest me much; and that he has been successful makes no difference to *me*, though it makes all the difference to the world. Oh! Esdaile," he added bitterly, "it is we Patricians who are in reality vulgar, when we bow down to the golden calf, as in this case. They are not good enough for us to know, till extravagance brings us to the brink of ruin, and then they are good enough for us to marry, forsooth!"

"What do you mean, Stapylton?"

“That my father, having lost so many thousands this year, is anxious I should honour Miss Forsepp by bestowing my hand upon her. There is the whole secret of the family being invited for the first time within our doors. What say you, reverend sir, are we not true and faithful worshippers of Mammon? ‘*Quærenda pecunia primum, virtus post nummos*,’ as Horace wrote. I am sick of it all, Esdaile, and sometimes think I shall strap my knapsack on my back and go and try for a professorship at some German University, — ‘passing rich on forty pounds a year,’ eh?”

“You would be happier if you had obligatory work, of whatever kind, I believe. Yours is a lymphatic nature that must have work to keep it in healthy moral training. But from your own showing there is some as hard, and more important and responsible than a Göttingen professorship before you. Don’t overlook what is ready to your hand. Because your tastes are not those of a financier, you are disposed to slight the character and ability of the man who ‘masters fortune.’ You are wrong. If your father’s affairs are really involved, lay

your shoulder to the wheel,—use all your energy and talent towards extricating them. This is clearly a *duty*, and—I speak plainly—you already leave them too much to your brother. The management of the estate—why should you not master its details? Why, in the pursuit of your æsthetic tastes, remain entirely ignorant of the value of land, its capabilities and requirements? Are these things necessarily divided? I think not. It is a buried talent you will have to render up an account of. And Jack,—he may be a good farmer, but his genius otherwise seems developed in getting rid of money in horse racing, etc., rather than in redeeming your fortunes.”

“I hope,” interrupted Philip, “he may not be induced to redeem them by a step which—well, well—no matter. You are quite right, Esdaile. I ought to look after things more than I have done; but I am a perfect fool in matters of business, that is the truth. Hallo, Piscator! you missed there a venerable trout, two pound weight, at least. Come, it is time for us to be going. The sun is set and there is no stir of man or beast: not even the twitter

of a bird. I believe your village of Ashford is already fast asleep. Only from the ale-house door there comes a burst of brutal merriment. What a problem these lives are! What were they given for? Whither do they tend? The working them out from the origin of evil to a happier solution—the great human question—is a better study, Esdaile, than the working out of pounds, shillings, and pence into infinitude.”

“Do not let your energies dissipate themselves in German mysticism, Stapylton. Even before the great human question, stand the direct *personal* questions we shall all have to answer. Once again, you have plenty of that counter-grain distasteful work which he only is a real hero who will boldly encounter, leaving the more congenial fields of his imagination—the tournaments of romance, so to speak. The country lies before you: go in, like your namesake of Macedon, and conquer. Here is my door. Good night.”

A man, this, wasting for lack of persistent strength and concentration to direct his rare gifts to their right use. A dreamer of high and poetical dreams, of a large human sympathy,

and warm generous heart; not without a clear judgment: a high, if not the highest order of intellect—why should he be what he is, a useless loiterer by the roadside, instead of one of the foremost in our race?

I am deeply interested in Philip Stapylton, as you will see from the unconscionable length to which I have drawn out this budget. He is a fine fellow, who is better fitted by nature for almost any other position than that he now holds, and must hold hereafter. A painter, a poet, a philosopher, an orator in the senate, a statesman in the council: all or any of these, rather than the many-acred squire, hampered with hereditary debt, which he is likely to find himself one day. Will he sink or swim? I ask sometimes: allow himself to be carried down resistless, or strike out boldly and prove he is not the listless dreamer men take him to be? Time will show.

V.

August 20.

I have a quiet hour to-night, which, being in a mood to talk, is to be devoted to your service. Pages of very trivial matter will be inflicted on you, which must be patiently borne, for I want you to know all my neighbours better than you do at present. I begin to feel perfectly at home here, and am as happy as any fellow of three-and-twenty, with good lungs, good legs, and plenty of work, deserves to be.

I called yesterday on Mrs. Halliday. There was an endeavour on the part of that lady to scuffle some article behind the sofa as I entered, but on her eldest daughter's exclaiming, "It is only Mr. Esdaile, mamma," Mrs. Halliday, with an expression of considerable relief, disclosed a structure of lace and roses

upon which she was evidently engaged; saying with a nod and a smile, that, as it was *only* me, she didn't mind. *Poor* curates never are minded: it is one of the special privileges of their social position.

A pretty sharp-eyed young lady, much flounced, and with her hair à *l'Impératrice*, entered.

"My sister, Mr. Esdaile, whom I think you do not know," said Miss Halliday (with a deprecating glance at me which meant, "Be lenient to her frivolities.") "Clemmy, Mr. Esdaile. Have you that paper I lent you on the Reformation of Ethiopian Serenaders, dear? I wanted to show it to Mr. Esdaile."

"Oh! do you go in for evangelicals?" asked the other young lady briskly, turning to me; "because Kitty has got a sort of hydrophobia lately,—negroes and organ boys, and everything that is most opposed to fresh water and soap. High Church and a clean charity school for me; surplices and flowers and all that sort of thing, so much more jolly. I was in hopes you were of my way of thinking, Mr. Esdaile."

I was somewhat staggered by the young lady's

tone (the voice, by-the-bye, like a flageolet, so rapid, sharp, and high), and assured her that I had no personal objection to the institution of soap and water, and indeed held cleanliness to be next to godliness. As I did not feel disposed to enter into a High Church controversy, I adroitly avoided that part of her challenge, by remarking that I hoped to find in her an able auxiliary in our Sunday-school.

“Fancy my teaching! Why I never could learn anything in my life. By a special intervention of Providence, I can read, and my intimate friends are acquainted with certain hieroglyphics which stand for my name. Do you really think, now, I should make a respectable Sunday-school teacher? I talk about High Church, but of course I know nothing about it, only it’s all the go, now; and I do like the candles and embroidered cloths, it’s so amusing, and gives one something to look at in church. And the schools, too; it is just like a ballet, all the children rising up in a row, with their white aprons. By-the-bye, if they want to learn the *deux temps*, you might safely send them to me; no one better at rota-

tories, I flatter myself, or billiards. I'm a dab at billiards, Captain Chillington says."

"How you do run on, dear child!" said the fond and foolish mother from her sofa.

And indeed that young lady had run on at a pace which left me breathless with astonishment far behind. Brothers hath she none. Whence, then, this club and college slang? Is this the jargon of our rising *lionnes*,—the "very fast" ladies of whom I occasionally hear? Pray inform me, if you can.

"You dine at the castle, to-morrow?" continued Mrs. Halliday. "Is there to be a large party, do you know?"

"No one but Count Bismark and Captain Chillington, I think," interposed the fair Clemmy. "They arrive to-day."

I mildly observed that I understood the Montacutes were invited.

"Oh! yes; but they're nobody."

"Being neither Counts nor Guardsmen," remarked Miss Kitty sarcastically.

"We know them so well," rejoined Clemmy; "they're not worth dressing for. I know that was what the maternal's question meant."

"Yes," said the maternal. "Let me see; seven and three are ten and two are twelve: eight roses, I should think, would be enough for twelve people, Clem?" holding up the cap thoughtfully in her hand.

"The quantities of money you spend on artificial flowers would be much better employed on the poor, mamma," said her eldest daughter.

A true remark, possibly; but we all know that good out of its place becomes evil.

She continued, "I trust they will not play at *vingt et un*, or that horrid race-course game they are so fond of, to-morrow."

"Mr. Esdaile will give you absolution, Kitty, for the sin of looking on at us," giggled Miss Clemmy. "She only accepted, when she heard you were to be there, Mr. Esdaile; she couldn't trust herself in our godless company without some spiritual help, for flesh is weak!"

"What nonsense you do talk!" said her sister, irritably, then abruptly changing the subject: "You have heard, Mr. Esdaile, that the Priory is taken at last? that melancholy old house that has been so long uninhabited. I was always in hopes it might be occupied some day by a

sisterhood : and now of course we shall be having some horrid common-place neighbours, and the whole interest and character of the grim old place will be gone."

"Not if what I hear is true. I am told the new comer, Mrs. Morley, intends visiting no one, not even allowing a visitor inside her gates. Sally, my maid, whose brother is gardener at the Priory, volunteered the information this morning, so your fears of a common-place acquaintance are groundless."

"Well, I *do* think," said Mrs. Halliday, "it is very impertinent of any new comer giving themselves those airs. You will confess, Mr. Esdaile, with such a very aristocratic neighbourhood as we have, that——"

"I have no doubt she has a spiritual calling," interrupted Miss Halliday, "and her eyes are opened to the emptiness and frivolity of the world. I hope I may find in her a kindred spirit."

"No doubt, Kitty; if Mrs. What's-her-name is shut up in the Priory, and you remain long enough in your own room, a magnetic sympathy will penetrate the walls," said Miss Clemmy.

What fun it would be, by the way, to dress up *en garçon* and invade the whole party,—I suppose she is old—in her solitude ?”

Miss Halliday threw her soft eyes to the plaister ornament in the ceiling, and her sister continued,

“Get over the wall—conceal one’s-self among the trees: I should be *up a tree*, if I was discovered, ha, ha !” (joke lost on both ladies); “dart out on the old party in the middle of her walk,—nothing easier; oh! wouldn’t it be immense fun, Mr. Esdaile !”

It was evident the young “party” was trying to astonish me; I answered composedly,

“Darting out on any one in her walk has hardly been my idea of fun since I was five years old; though no one enjoys the article more, I assure you, when I can have it to my taste.”

Soon after this I rose, moralizing on the strangely different results that the same precepts and example have produced in these two sisters. Petted and spoilt at home, left to run very wild, taken to London, and honoured by the attention of some of the fast young men

of the day, because "she is such fun," which attention she strives to retain by still further extravagance of slang talk and manner: this seems, in a few words, to be the history of Miss Clementina. In her sister I am disappointed. With a craving for religious excitements, there is considerable selfishness and an utter neglect of those unobtrusive duties that should fall quietly into the life of every woman. I learn that Mrs. Halliday is ill-off: it needs no gift of divination to decide that she is a "bad manager," always extravagant, always in difficulties. Her eldest daughter, far from helping her mother either in the management of household matters, or in the extrication of her complicated bills, considers such occupation as sublunary and vain, and multiplies the family debt by her assistance to Missions and Sisterhoods, almost as much as Miss Clem by her London season. Not thus is the good work forwarded: not thus (if I ever for a moment was deluded into thinking so) is a woman trained to become a good wife and head of a family; least of all a clergyman's.

Ashford Castle is in the pseudo-gothic style

that came in when Horace Walpole built Strawberry Hill, and introduced a taste for the "Romantic." In other words, it is a foolish and ugly building, utterly unlike the feudal castles it affects to imitate, but strongly resembling the sand and shell structures we see on nursery mantel-pieces. But the interior is comfortable; the long low library, with its pointed-arched windows, thanks to Lady Caroline, is a pretty and a pleasant room, with its air of London luxury and refinement in the heavy embroidered portières and tables laden with the newest books and prints.

Into this room I was shown, after my long walk, and found a gentleman stretched full-length in a *causeuse*—the only one of the party who was dressed for the evening. He rose and introduced himself with a very slightly foreign accent as Count Bismark. Tall and fair, remarkably handsome in feature and graceful in manner and movement, he has succeeded in attaining that desideratum of so many foreigners, "*l'air Anglais*." His dress, not less than his address, is English: almost the only Germanism he retains is the occasional

interjection, "So!" His manners are those of a man well-assured of his own position, and accustomed to mix in the best society. Courteous without condescension, easy without familiarity: the effect of such a man's conversation I have always found is to make one feel pleased with oneself—one scarcely knows why. The mouth is a sensual one; but it is difficult to resist the charm of those expressive eyes and the smile that plays over the face at times. He told me he knew the place well, that he had often been staying at the Castle: he talked of the excellent covers; asked me if I liked "the chase?" then laughingly apologised when I told him I was the village curate; and was so entertaining in the contrast he drew between English and German country life, that by the time Lady Caroline and her daughter entered I had come to the conclusion that their guest was certainly a very agreeable man, whatever else he might be. Admiral Montacute with his eldest and youngest daughters arrived soon after, followed by the Hallidays and Colonel Shaddock. Then a fine old gentleman, the Dean of —, an uncle of Lady Caroline's,

who is staying in the Castle, with Sir Richard and his son, and Captain Chillington, a man of fashion about town, I am given to understand.

At dinner I found myself between two young ladies, neither of whom seemed much disposed to converse. Miss Ashford, whom I had handed in, naturally found more amusement in the London Captain's small talk on the other side of her, than in the initiatory observations of the stranger-curate. They talked of the Cremorne Fête—what a pity it had been such a wet night! the smell of the river at that last breakfast they were at, and other subjects of a no less absorbing nature. In despair of finding any of similar interest to the young lady, I turned to Vanda Montacute, with whom, as you know, I never yet got on. Young Ashford's efforts on the other side of her had all been nipped in the bud: he had turned for consolation to the lively Clemmy, so I resolved to make one more effort with my silent neighbour, and my perseverance was rewarded; I never saw so far down into that strange young nature before.

“Your sister looks tired this evening,” (I observed that Vanda's eyes were rivetted on

her, to whom the Count was making himself agreeable at the other end of the table, or trying to do so, but judging from Ellicc's face, not with complete success). "She has been working too hard with our troublesome classes, I am afraid: she is indefatigable. Why will you not help her?"

"My sister likes it: I don't. I hate everything that has to do with Ashford and its people."

"I am sorry for that. How have they incurred your lasting wrath?"

No reply.

"Our little parish has its faults, no doubt," I continued, "but there is plenty of kindly feeling, and we should all of us do the most to promote this between different classes, as well as in our own. Don't you think so? I am bound to say that I individually have met with great kindness from both rich and poor since I came among you."

"What do you call kindness from the poor?"

"What the kindness of the heart always is — patience and forbearance with my many short-comings, and a willingness to believe that I am heartily interested for them."

“As we have experienced nothing but the reverse of these fine qualities since we came to live in Ashford eight years ago, you’ll excuse my doubting them. The poor only curtsy to one in the street, and come to your church, Mr. Esdaile, for the sake of the flannel and groceries; and as to the rich——”

An expression of withering scorn supplied only too efficiently the conclusion of her sentence.

“Come, you are trying to be a female Timon, Miss Vanda; but it won’t do. Did I not hear you positively declare you would go to the race ball? Stand and deliver up your reasons for ever frequenting this despised society.”

“I must go out sometimes; my father wishes it.”

“Not in this case, I believe?” I tried to catch her eye; but she evaded the look and the question.

“I am not indebted to any one’s hospitality for a race ball; that is one comfort.”

“Do you really nourish this sort of feeling?” I said gravely; “do you never like to feel yourself under an obligation to any one?”

“We are very poor. We can never return any civilities, as they are called. We are invited to some houses because my sister plays and can amuse people, and perhaps because we are tolerably good looking. On those terms I had rather not go, when I reflect how we were treated, how my *mother* was treated, when we came to England first. I was a child, but I can remember it, the impertinence of these very Ashfords among the number; and there is *nothing* I would not give to be in a position some day to repay them for their insolence. There, you have my reasons for hating Ashford society. Go and tell them, Mr. Esdaile; you are at liberty to do so.”

“It would hardly tend to the fellowship and good feeling I wish to promote.” I tried to smile, but felt really saddened at this young girl’s jaundiced view of society. “And now that you have denounced all you dislike so warmly, tell me what sort of life and people you prefer. I suppose a continental life? one of varied travel and perpetual excitement? and principally the society of foreigners?”

“Perhaps. But the smallest German Court,

the meanest town abroad, would be preferable to this stupid English country life."

"You would not find a German Court an Utopia, as regards brotherly goodwill and affection. Unless report belie them grossly, envy, hatred, and malice flourish in those refined soils even more—though you would not believe it—than in an English country village."

"There, at least, people are more upon a footing, and poverty is not a crime."

"But pride is one, or very near it, all the world over, Miss Vanda; such pride as caused Lucifer's fall; such pride as——"

Fortunately for my politeness, perhaps, the ladies rose at that moment.

Over the claret, conversation became general: there was a closing up towards Sir Richard's end of the table, and—out of compliment to the Dean, I suppose—the Jewish Disabilities Bill and other subjects of a religious-political character were moved round with the wine. The Dean did little else than nod, or shake his venerable head, as the occasion demanded, and sipped his glass at intervals. The Baronet's talk was common-place enough; it might be

described as leading articles and water—all the obvious, conventional views on every question, with their strength diluted to suit the weakest brain. One thing struck me forcibly: the number of times, without adequate occasion, that he introduced the names and sayings of illustrious personages. “When I was staying at Windsor,” was too often the preface to a most insignificant remark; “Her Majesty did me the honour to remark,” or “the Prince observed to me in confidence,” recurred with fatal precision, like minute guns, throughout his talk. Like minute guns, too, when they were fired, one’s ears waited in a state of irritable tension for the next report: a vulgarity this, peculiarly English, even in men as well born as Sir Richard. The Count, who, I dare say, is intimate with half the crowned heads in Europe, drops them—as Jove did his intolerable grandeur—when in converse with ordinary mortals. Turning from our royally-favoured host, I catch such fragments as the following on the opposite side, from young Ashford.

“I say, Bismark, have you backed your mare heavily for the sweepstakes on Wednesday?”

Chillington *loquitur*. "I stand to win a cool thousand on her, but it'll be a tightish race; that horse of Jack Stapylton's showed good running the other day. Don't let any of those confounded fellows get hold of your trainer, Bismark. They'll make the mare safe, if you don't look out sharp."

"Trust Bismark," says young Ashford, with a pale weak grin, "He's too knowing a plant to be done, though he is a *fureigneer*, as the grooms disrespectfully call him."

"You give me credit for too much," replied Bismark, "I lost everything I entered for last year."

"By-the-bye," said Chillington, "How came it that clipping horse of yours was withdrawn at the Derby? and you yourself disappeared, no one knew where, for a time. You might have made a pot of money there."

"I was out of England," said the Count with constraint, and, I fancied, the slightest possible shade crossing his face.

"What on earth made you leave England just then?" asked young Ashford, blundering on without any tact.

"Private business," was the cool reply.

"Have you the same jock you had last year?" drawled Chillington.

"No: he broke his neck at the Leamington steeple-chase. I'm looking out for a young light weight with nerve. Any about here, Ashford?"

The youth shook his head dubiously; and Chillington, sipping his claret, said with a freezing smile,

"I say, you know, if you really want one, there's Clem Halliday with all the requisite qualifications, and ready, I'm sure, if you ask her. I don't mind backing her for a pony."

Young Ashford exploded with mirth at this lively jest, and indulged us with sundry suggestions as to Clem's attire, until suddenly pulled up by old Shaddock.

"Gentlemen," said the veteran, with a wave of his hand, as though warding off any discourteous interpretation to his words, "It was an understood rule in my regiment that ladies' names should never be mentioned at the mess-table,—unless, indeed, when we drank 'the health of the ladies.' I am old fashioned

enough to think both the rule and the exception good."

Chillington stared at being addressed as a "gentleman;" Ashford looked exceedingly confused, and blushed all round his shirt-collars; Bismark, feeling himself innocent, smiled quietly; and the old Colonel, as not wishing to be too hard on these "boys," relaxed into a smile.

"Talking of races puts me in mind of those I used to see in the West Indies—nigger boys tied on jackasses." ('On old Colonels, I suppose,' murmured Chillington). "Give you my word, sir, I never laughed more in my life. Excellent sport—excellent."

Captain Chillington appeared to think it must have been indifferent sport, for he stared in a more glassy manner than ever, without the ripple of a smile on his face. The butler entered at that moment with a leathern bag which he delivered with great ceremony into the hands of Sir Richard.

"Ha! the evening post," exclaimed the Baronet, unlocking the bag. "Let us see—'On Her Majesty's service,' eh? The Secretary of State, ha! Three letters for Lady

Caroline. The Dook's hand. One for you, Bismark; and the *Times* second edition: any one like to open it? There, Colonel, you will see the news from India."

"Thank you," replied the Colonel hurriedly; "but I shall see it to-morrow morning at breakfast. The *Times* comes in with my muffin, and I make a rule of never forestalling it. I shall know the news quite soon enough, thank you."

And adhering resolutely to this, he shut his ears to the voice of the *Times'* syren, when passages of her song were chaunted by one or other for the public benefit, and I am afraid actually regarded it as a personal injury that his morning meal of politics should be thrust down his throat beforehand. Sir Richard, meantime, with elevated eyes, read schedules A and B, and looked exceedingly important and official over a foolscap letter, with two inches of margin,—an oasis of writing, so to speak, in a desert of blue lined paper. The Admiral and the Dean hob-nobbed, and the Colonel talked pertinaciously to me, to avoid hearing the *Russeliana* that Chillington or Ashford read aloud. Presently we rose to join the ladies; and this was how the party

soon disposed itself. Sir Richard, Mrs. Halliday, Colonel Shaddock, and the Admiral sat down to whist; Lady Caroline was good enough to invite me to sit by her on the sofa; then she asked Ellice to play, and, as a matter of course, indulged me with a languid twaddle about her schools the whole time, till I felt unchristianly savage; Captain Chillington assisted Miss Ashford in the arduous duties of the tea-table; Miss Halliday engaged the Dean to listen to her views upon the state of the Church; Miss Clem, at the open window, amused herself—and noisily enough, too—with young Ashford; Vanda sat at a distant table, turning over some prints. Was it not the most natural thing in life, that Bismark, the only unoccupied man, should saunter up and sit down beside her? The inspection of that portfolio appeared to be interesting: from where I sat, I remarked that the study of each print occupied fully five minutes.

“Blanche, my dear,” said Lady Caroline, when Ellice rose from the piano, “and Clemmy, my love, come here; I want you to arrange something about these tableaux we talked about. I dare say, Count Bismark, you are clever at

that kind of thing, and can arrange something or other. It is all a shocking bore and a trouble, but during the race week one must do something, Sir Richard says, for popularity, — a dance or something. I'm sure, so worn out as one is after London, to have to begin it all over again is a shocking bore ; but one must sacrifice one's-self, as Sir Richard says."

"Vanda," cried Clem, "we want to do a group of the passions. You've a tragedy-queen face, and will do capitally for Hatred."

"And you for Jealousy, Clemmy," was the tart reply.

"Oh! dear no; I've no pretensions to anything so grand. I shall be Mirth."

"I didn't know Mirth was a passion. I thought it was only the expression of an empty head and heart."

"Ellice shall be Anger," continued this interesting and sprightly girl: "look at her! Linda shall be Love,—'I love my love with an L.' What will you be, Blanche?"

"Oh! poor I am fit for nothing but Fear."

"But you must introduce some gentlemen into your group, my dear," said Lady Caroline.

“Very well: there’s the Count; he’ll do for Remorse,” pursued Miss Clem: “remorse consequent on all his evil deeds. And Sir Richard—what shall we have for Sir Richard? In consideration of his years, we will give him Avarice; that’s a good respectable old passion, isn’t it, Lady Caroline?”

“Respectable, my love? oh! yes; pray let everything be perfectly respectable. What do you think, by-the-bye, of trying something of Faust and Marguerite? So pretty, you know—as they had at the Princess’s.”

“You don’t mean the angels dragging her up to heaven? Good gracious! who is there among us fit to be an angel?—unless it’s you, Mr. Esdaile, in a surplice, with wings.”

“Nonsense, my dear Clemmy,” said Lady Caroline. “Of course I mean the scene in the garden, you know. The Count would make a charming Faust: and who shall we have for Marguerite? Perhaps Miss Vanda Montacute.”

“Marguerite ought to be fair,” said Ellice, hastily, “and my sister is dark. Miss Ashford is more suited to it.”

“Oh! dear no,” Lady Caroline coldly rejoined, “Blanche is too young and too — altogether I shouldn’t wish her to appear in that sort of—of—you see she has no nerve—and——”

Seeing the puzzle she was in how to get out of her dilemma with a decent grace, Ellice rescued her.

“Exactly—I understand. Miss Ashford is young and shy: but you will have no lack of young ladies, and if you will excuse us, my sisters and I had rather not perform.”

“What objection can you have?” cried Miss Clem. “Really, Ellice, you’re not becoming prudish and proper, I hope, like Kitty? I shall begin to think it is all your fault, Mr. Esdaile,” she continued, turning to me. I was angry at feeling myself growing red, but I replied,

“On the contrary, I see no objection to tableaux, and shall have much pleasure in being a spectator, if I am invited.”

I was sure that Ellice was annoyed at the whole affair, though, with that admirable self-command I have before observed in her, she

evinced it neither by look nor word. Presently, however, she withdrew from the chattering upon dresses and attitudes that ensued, and I followed her to the sofa.

"How does your singing-class get on?" I could think of nothing better to open conversation.

"Pretty well. What was my sister talking to you about at dinner?"

"Principally about herself—a subject upon which I confess myself curious."

"Poor child!"

"Why so? She seems singularly well able to defend herself."

"Ah! that is just it. Like Ishmael, her hand is against every man: and she believes that every man's hand is against her. If you could succeed in persuading her otherwise, you would do her a real kindness."

"Have you not great influence with her?"

"Unfortunately, no. I love her very much, but hers is a strange nature. I could hardly make you understand it. She is a little jealous of me, to begin with. She knows I have no real authority over her: my father's doating

fondness for her weakens any that I might have; and many circumstances in her early childhood have tended to embitter her disposition. Poor darling! It is not her fault: she has a loving heart—I mean a heart *capable* of deep all-enduring love at the bottom—that makes it the more dangerous, unfortunately. Her manners are so little winning to the generality of the world, that when anyone, from whatever motive, resolves to conquer that proud young heart, a very little art I am afraid will make it yield.”

It was not difficult to divine the current of her thoughts. After a moment’s pause, I said carelessly,

“Have you much penetration into character?”

“Most women believe they have.”

“Now, as a stranger, what is the impression Count Bismark makes on you?”

“He is not a stranger: he was here last year. I dislike him particularly.”

“There is something very attractive about him on first acquaintance. Do you think him insincere? or what is the reason of your dislike?”

“I can’t tell you why, but I have a natural

repugnance to him. I am sure he is a man of inordinate vanity, and of no principle. His great desire is to charm, and he generally succeeds: men call him 'a good fellow,' and women 'a fascinating man;' but he exercises no fascination over me."

"He is good-tempered, at all events, and not an unkind nature, or physiognomy is a humbug."

"Perhaps so; but sometimes—in short, I can't argue about an antipathy, Mr. Esdaile; no woman can. I only know I distrust Count Bismark. I think he is one of the men who, for the amusement of an hour, would sacrifice a girl's happiness. His self-love leads him to try and make every woman fall in love with him. That he is capable of a strong attachment himself, I doubt."

"I do not wonder, then," I said in a low voice, "at your anxiety that your sister should not be much in his society. Her peculiar disposition would offer a zest to the conquest in the eyes of such a man, if he is really what you believe. Does not your father see the danger?"

“No; he sees nothing but that Vanda, who cannot tolerate our quiet country society generally, is anxious to come here, and to attend these races next week; and my poor dear father is pleased, so my representations are of no effect, and only exasperate Vanda against me. She will not believe that it is my anxiety for her future happiness — her peace of mind — that prompts me. I have pointed out to her the impossibility of such a man as that thinking of marrying a penniless girl of no worldly position. She invariably replies that she knows it; that she merely amuses herself, as he does, and scoffs at the idea of falling in love herself. She generally ends by saying, it is hard that Linda and I who can find pleasure in some society here, should be jealous—as she calls it, poor dear!—of her meeting any one who is congenial to her. You can have no idea of the difficulty of dealing with such a character as Vanda’s.”

“If anything can deal successfully with it, it should be your wise and gentle forbearance.”

The whist party was broken up, and some one approaching at that moment, I rose and

walked to the window, pondering on what I had just heard. The window was open, and the fragrant odour of cigars reached me as I leant my head out, and beheld—was it possible? nay, yes, by all that is incredible!—Clem Halliday smoking a weed with Chillington and young Ashford. Now I have heard of such things; but in my extraordinary greenness—would you believe it?—I have never seen a young lady smoke before. I almost ceased to wonder at those after dinner jests.

But carriages are announced, and Mrs. Halliday is inquiring in a plaintive voice after Clem. That young damsel, throwing away the end of her cigar, steps carelessly into the room, and offers me a place home in their fly, which I decline, stating the truth, that I much prefer walking. So, after putting Ellice's shawl on, and promising young Ashford to join in the cricket match here on Monday, if no duty calls me elsewhere, I step out of the hall-door and strike across the park in the moonlight.

What a glorious night! Myriads of stars are clustered about the heavens; the eye vainly endeavours to count them scattered over that

fathomless blue ocean. A tide of fleecy clouds flows past, through which, as in a clear water, the planets are seen burning steadily, and the small stars flash and quiver. The harvest moon, so large and lustrous, hangs over the woods yonder, rippling the lake with its steel-gold light, and striking with a sudden glory the steeple of the church below. How peaceful it all is! The cattle sleeping on the bank, the deer huddled under the wide-spreading beeches that "lay their dark arms about the field," the distant clock, with its tiny voice, striking the eleventh hour. What a contrast is this to the scene I have just quitted! With two exceptions, none of the actors are in harmony with it. To the pure-hearted old soldier and to that thoughtful girl it speaks of things beyond the breathless hunt after pleasure, ambition, or mere worldly prosperity. Has it nothing to say to those others, and thousands like them, scattered over England this night? Ah! brilliant and pleasant company though they be, we love not to picture them alone: anything but that. Their life is one long endeavour to escape from solitude: and the canker of this world eats more

and more into the heart, till the latter becomes, indeed, a very tattered rag. Would that the night could bring its holy messages to them !

Sir Richard, elbow deep in royalties and politics, how does the moonlight shining down upon the floor of your dressing-room speak to you? Does it bring a thought of anything beyond the ripening crops of yonder farm? Does it tell you anything of a time when those broad lands shall own another lord, and popularity and distinction for you shall be no more? And you, Lady Caroline, have you energy enough to open that shutter, and gaze for five minutes on the fair expanse of flower and lawn bathed in pure moonlight? Let it in a flood into your heart, and recal the days when you were fresh and unworldly. The hot breath has already scorched the brow of that young girl beside you. Is there no lesson you have taught her in all these years, that will tend to make her happier, when she stands like you, a withered woman in the shortening days of life? And ye, O Bismark, Chillington, and Co., when ye come face to face with nature, as ye must in the solitude of your wind-blown moors and Norway fisheries,

do ye ever encourage the thoughts that arise, I suppose, in every human mind at some time or other? Do ye not rather put them away, like unwelcome duns, from the door? Beware! for so might some have entertained angels un-awares. The silence of your own hearts has certain secrets to tell, worth all the Derbys and St. Legers, if ye will but listen.

It is past one o'clock, and here I am still scribbling away by the light of a perishing lamp. Many thoughts—some sweet, some sad—engendered this evening, are crowding in my brain; but I will set none of them down,—no, not even if I could find words to do so. As you write to me that you are going from home on a tour, I shall send no more letters at present; but a budget of leaves from my diary—such portions as will most interest you—shall be forwarded by-and-bye. Ask Fritz if he knows anything of this Count Bismark, or can discover anything of his antecedents.

Your loving brother,

HERBERT.

DIARY.

Friday.—MET Miss Tarragon in the street, who, as usual, bore down upon me and fired a broadside of questions.

“Well, Mr. Esdaile, have you called on the new comer, Mrs. Morley, yet? No? Good gracious me! why it’s the clergyman’s place, of course. She has been a week at the Priory. Not receive anybody? Stuff and nonsense. Of course she must see you. And I hear she’s a very pretty woman,—more fool to wear a thick veil: did you see her at church? Take care, now; don’t be making a fool of yourself. Taken the house for a year, I’m told. Do you know what she gives? Brought two old servants with her. What a humbug old servants are! they always have the upper hand of one. By-the-

bye, I say, if she's going to take up the exclusive line towards us humble Ashfordians, you just tell her that it won't do: you can put it in clergyman's language, you know."

"I observed that the lady occupying the Priory pew last Sunday was dressed in black; and I understand that she does not wish to see *anyone*: so she is probably in some deep affliction—and not an exclusive fine lady."

"I hope so: nothing I hate so much. What Morleys is she of? Where does she come from? There's something altogether mysterious about her. No one knows how or why she came here, and the servants, they all tell me, are as close as wax. Very absurd, ain't it? What's the use of making an Udolpho business of it? Everything's sure to be known in Ashford sooner or later. Probably a grocer's widow in the city. Talking about groceries, how can you be so extravagant, Mr. Esdaile, as to drink 5s. 6d. tea? Saw it down in Mrs. Jones' book, so it's no use saying you don't. And, by-the-bye, about widows, I wish you *would* speak to that silly old woman, Mrs. Halliday, about the way she dresses: I've

done all I can. Why, good gracious me, as I tell her, look at the way *I* dress, and I'm fifteen years younger than she is, at the very least. Stuff and nonsense, you go and give her a sound scolding from Corinthians, about vain adornments and plaiting of hair (false plaits too), and all the rest of it. There, I've fifty things to do before luncheon. Good bye."

As Sir Walter Scott said that he never talked to a beggar without deriving information, so I endeavour to extract benefit even from Miss Tarragon's harangues. Acting on her suggestion I called at the Priory this afternoon, but, as I anticipated, was denied admittance. The white-headed respectable-looking butler who answered the door, instead of saying that Mrs. Morley was "not at home," plainly stated that his mistress did not receive visitors. I left my card and turned my steps towards John Hurst's cottage.

I had not seen his wife for ten days, and was glad to find how much better she was looking. In answer to my enquiries for John, she replied,

"Well, he be stout in health, and take to

his work kinder nor he did, sir, but yet indifferent-like, and dull when he be come home. If he did but know, sir, how it makes my heart ache to see him a-setting there like a stone, hour after hour with his pipe, staring at the poor babby's crib—and never says no-think to no one!”

Miss Montacute came in just then, bringing some work for Mrs. Hurst, and soon afterwards I accompanied the former home. She was silent, and her face, generally so calm and inscrutable, looked anxious. At length she said,

“I have been writing to-day to your cousin—my godfather Captain Ellice. He is a man of the world.”

“Do you use that in a complimentary or an opprobrious sense?”

“His opinion has weight with my father: he will listen to him,” was her answer.

“What about?”

A pause.

“About Count Bismark. I cannot get my father to see it. It makes me very unhappy. Do you not see, Mr. Esdaile, that the admi-

ration of a man of that sort is a great disadvantage to a girl?"

"Certainly: if he is not in earnest. But are you really sure that Count Bismark is incapable of a serious attachment?"

"I do not know that, but I do feel very sure that he will not marry a girl in Vanda's position: and what is amusement to him will be death to her. I know too well her proud keenly-sensitive nature—capable of making any sacrifice if she should ever really love, and incapable of surviving desertion, or even that domestic neglect which is the lot of so many of us women. Vanda must be everything or nothing. Therefore I am doubly uneasy about her, seeing as I do what misery she is preparing for herself. Were she in poor Linda's position—are the village gossips busy with Linda's name, Mr. Esdaile?"

"I am not well up in village gossip, and yet I saw Miss Tarragon this morning, but she said nothing. Do you refer to Jack Stapylton?"

"Yes: of course *we* think his father and mother have behaved very badly. As a boy

he was constantly allowed to be with us, like our own brother: and in *those* days we were always at the Hall. They should at the very first have put a decided veto upon the engagement, not let it hang on so long, and then say he shall not marry before he is five-and-thirty. Eight years is a long, long time in this short life of ours. And Jack, though a fine fellow, is volatile and I am afraid weak: so I hope Linda will have the courage herself to break it off; but it is not the less hard on her, and she bears it so nobly—with such constancy, and patience, and gentleness! To Vanda, with her strong feelings, this indignity put upon us is not unnaturally another source of irritation and bitterness. You will hear it all canvassed over and over again, no doubt; so I tell you beforehand, Mr. Esdaile, as one whom I—whom we already venture to consider a friend, and to talk unreservedly with on these matters.”

The wind lifted the brown feather of her hat and heightened (perhaps?) the colour in her cheek, and, as she raised her clear and candid eyes into my face, I thought I had never seen her look so charming.

“Pray continue to do so, and count on me ever for such advice or help as I can give you. Not being ‘a man of the world,’ I don’t know how far society sanctions or disapproves of this sort of thing; but one thing my own sense shows me, that people must make or mar their own happiness in this world. It is worse than useless to interfere; it is assuming a responsibility God never meant us to have over each other. By all means point out the difficulties or dangers of any course to your sisters; but do not exert your influence beyond this.”

“I cannot sit by,” Ellice replied warmly, “and see them each sacrifice her life to a dream, without interposing to try and prevent it. It mayn’t be philosophical; but I cannot.”

“It is not as being philosophical, if you use the word to denote abstract reasoning into which the heart does not enter, that I say this, but because we are, every one of us, so differently constituted, that — putting aside those contingencies upon which we have no right to count, and with which God unexpectedly brightens the darkest lives sometimes — it is impossible we can decide on what shall constitute our

brother's future happiness or misery. What would be the misery of one is the consolation of another. Doesn't the poet say—

‘Better to have loved and been deceived,
Than never to have loved at all,’

or something like it? And, in confirmation of this, I remember hearing a woman say, after a most unhappy married life, that she would go through it all again, sooner than have lived *un-loved*, though the love in her case soon died out, and left nothing but ashes.”

We were at the gate and Ellice held out her hand.

“Your line of argument is singular, Mr. Esdaile, but I dare say you are right. Only, as regards Vanda, I cannot be wrong in trying to ward off the danger before it be too late. Are you going to these tableaux on Tuesday? As Vanda was resolute, and my father *would* not object, I thought it better she should not be alone, so we both act, after all. You will come, won't you?”

Monday Evening.—Mr. Brigstock improved the occasion yesterday morning by holding forth eloquently against the forthcoming races. He

must have obtained his tutelary Baronet's sanction to the proceeding, or he would not have ventured to denounce an amusement patronized by "the Castle," in such strong terms. But, in the first place, Sir Richard himself has no sporting tastes, and tolerates them in his son and his guests merely as an exigence of fashion. And, in the next place, the oration was evidently addressed to "the lower orders;" and it was asumed, I suppose, that the dangers to them were other and greater than to the rich. Perhaps so; but I thought the Rector wrong; not because he didn't say a vast deal that was true and incontrovertible, but because he didn't fearlessly say the whole truth. Who believes that there is anything wicked in running one horse against another? Who can expect the poor man to believe it, when he sees all that he is taught to venerate most, Peers, Legislators, nay, Royalty itself, taking a keen interest in the sport, and personally encouraging it in all ways? Cock-fighting is gone out among us; so is prize-fighting in a great measure; but a love of the trial of animal speed or courage, in some form, seems inherent in our national

character. Not shutting our eyes to the fact, let us boldly say, "It is by your conduct on such occasions that you have it in your power to elevate or degrade the sport you love. Let no drunkenness, brawls, or other ill-conduct, bring it into ill-repute. Be especially careful as to that most English virtue of honesty. There are not two laws: all that is not fair dealing is foul. Remember that it is as dishonest to stake the sixpence that you owe on a chance, as it is to pick a pocket or nobble a race-horse. If you go, as many of you will, be not carried away by your excitement; keep a careful watch over your eye, your hand, your tongue. There will be many temptations; if you do not feel strong enough to say 'I will resist them,' stay away."

Some such words might reach their understandings, and have a practical effect. Whereas, our Rector's tirade against the "devices of Satan" are so much 'sound and fury, signifying nothing,' when they behold the Castle carriages sweep down the street towards the race-course, and know that their betters are enjoying its abominable delights.

I was sorry to observe that the Priory pew was empty, fearing that the solitary Mrs. Morley might have been alarmed by my card into abstaining even from divine service; but the doubt was more satisfactorily solved this morning, by my meeting Julep, the apothecary, just as he was leaving the Priory.

“No one ill there, I hope?”

“Our new comer; but nothing very serious. Hysteria and general debility of the nervous system,—more of the mind than the body, I suspect. Fine woman, sir, very fine; splendid anatomical specimen, and very stylish in her manners.”

After expressing a regret that I was not allowed to minister to her mind diseased, I parted from the worthy man.

I have had a busy day, so busy that I was obliged to forego the game of cricket I had promised myself; but late in the afternoon I walked round by the Castle meadows, on my return from a distant part of the parish, and the match was not yet over. The Castle and its inmates were playing the Parish, and the latter were having their last innings as I came

up. The sides were tolerably matched, but it was going against us; and I doubly regretted having had to yield my place to our loutish young butcher. Jack Stapylton performed prodigies of batting on the parish side, and looked the picture of a British Athlete in his suit of white flannel, much to the admiration of the bystanders. But at last even he gave in before the steady bowling of a thick-set little fellow with a bloated face and long arms, who I found was a groom of Bismark's, and the great card of the Castle side. Another little man, not much unlike a groom either, whom they called Lord Dumpling, played well, and all the young men staying now at the Castle, except Bismark and Chillington, took part in the game. The latter devoted himself to the service of the ladies in the marquee; the former smoked his cigar with the players outside.

"It is the only one of your English amusements that I cannot get a taste for," he said. "Anything you will but this: tennis—anything in short—but to put a man to stand out there in a field for a couple of hours, with the distant hope to catch a ball, without moving

except every half-hour to walk to the other side of the field,—this, truly, seems strange amusement!”

“Though very nearly English, you see, you are not quite so. We imbibe a love of cricket with our mother’s milk—or, more correctly to speak, with the milk and water of our great public and private schools.”

“So! It is a better imbibe—how do you say? taste in short, than that of duelling in *our* universities. But I admire all your institutions, Mr. Esdaile, and if I ever have a son he shall be educated in England.”

“Do you intend permanently settling in this country?” I asked, looking him full in the face.

“Ha! ha!” he laughed a short low laugh; “your ‘permanently’ is a long word. But look! look! That was a good stroke of Dumpling’s.”

Cries of “Bravo, Dumpling! run again!” and then shouts of laughter when the ball knocked off the hat of a bystander—a man in a flashy waistcoat, who made an inartistic clutch in the air at the ball, lost his balance and rolled over on the grass.

“That’s a soft party—that is,” observed a bystander.

“Poor Peter!” laughed the Count, “he thought it was my head he had between his fingers.” Which speech was dark to me, until I discovered that the prostrate hero was the Count’s valet.

That stroke decided the fate of the battle; and the ladies fluttered out of the tent, affecting great triumph, though of course they didn’t care twopence who lost or won. There is a great accession of numbers since I dined at the Castle last week: several elderly ladies and some young ones; among others Lord Dumpling’s sisters, the Miss Roley-Poleys, unaffected little maidens with very red cheeks. Lady Caroline extended a torpid hand.

“We shall see you to-morrow evening?”

Then as I was walking away, one of the elderly women evidently asked who I was, to which Lady Caroline responded audibly,

“Oh! only our new Curate. Really a very gentlemanlike unassuming young man—plain, but so unassuming, and it’s such a thing to have a gentleman in that sort of position.”

Whereon I pondered, naturally much elated at her Ladyship's kind opinion.

Wednesday, September 1.—The pictures at the Castle last night gave great satisfaction to a large gathering of the neighbourhood. It was a popularity entertainment, so that the invitations included all manners and degrees of men, terminating in the little Dorminster attorney, who does Sir Richard's electioneering business, and his elated spouse, who, you may be sure, will talk of little else for the next month to her less fortunate acquaintance. The evening terminated with a dance too, which was a most politic measure, as it enabled that large portion of the society, who always prefer being actors to spectators, to take a more prominent part in the amusements of their aristocratic neighbours. The *tarlatanes* and *deux temps* of the Dorminster fair were seen to the best advantage under the patronage of Dick Ashford and his fashionable young friends, who thought it great fun "trotting out these three-year olds," and by their condescension secured, let us hope, several votes for Sir Richard's next contested election.

The pictures had been capitally arranged and grouped by the Count, though not without difficulty. Objections had been raised to several of the subjects chosen. Lady Caroline, at the eleventh hour, had misgivings about a scene in which her daughter was to appear. Then Millais' "Hugonot" fell through, because none of the actors were nearly related to each other: and how could anything short of man and wife, or brother and sister, present that pleasing entanglement of arms in the flesh, which is so picturesque on canvass? But Lady Caroline, as I observed the other evening, is not so particular about "appearances" when her own daughter is not concerned. So she encouraged Vanda Montacute to appear as "Marguerite" to the Count's "Faust:" and an extremely good picture they made, with Sir Richard as "Mephistopheles" and an elderly "Martha" in the background. But I readily understood Ellice's objection to her sister's taking the part. I could not see the burning passionate gaze of that handsome man fixed on the Marguerite he is resolved to subdue, without an involuntary shudder to think that the actor,

perhaps, resembled only too closely the part he represented. The Admiral, good easy man, sat next me; but no such fancies disquieted him. His remarks on a species of entertainment so entirely new to him were amusing. When the curtain obstinately refused to be drawn, and stuck half-way, as it did at first, he cried aloud,

“Heave away. Now, boys, look alive: why, your rigging’s out of order.” And when at last Vanda was discovered as Mary, Queen of Scots, surrounded by her ladies, Douglas, Roland Græme, et cetera, the Admiral again exclaimed, “Bless me! why there’s my Van: she looks like a Queen, now don’t she? Well, but why don’t they begin to talk? They’re not going to stare at each other in that way all the time, without saying a word, are they? Mighty dull work for ’em, *that*, I should say. What, the curtain down already! So this is what you call a Tabble O, is it? Hem, what have we got now? Cleopatra. Ah! saw her needles when I was a middy: took a look at ’em from Alexandria, where we lay. Well, she wasn’t a beauty if she was like *that*. Deuced

plain woman, sir: who is she? And my old girl, Ellice, leaning over her! What is she doing to her head?"

"She is doing nothing to her head, Admiral—Cleopatra is dead—and her attendants, Iris and Charmion, are weeping over her."

"Oh! that's it. Well, if she's dead, of course she can't speak; but I think the others might say something, eh? This next is a ——" remains puzzled, double-eye glass in one hand, programme held a long way off, in the other.

"A Wattean group, Admiral! Those are the Miss Roley-Poleys, dressed as shepherdesses, and that is young Ashford as a shepherd, with a crook—meant to imitate Dresden china figures."

"Hem! more like common delft I should say! Shocking red arms those girls have! Do you suppose, Sir, a shepherd was ever dressed like that? He looks a great spoon, eh?——Why, Zounds, what have we here? What are those fellows doing in petticoats?"

"They are ancient Romans. Chillington is Julius Cæsar, and Jack Stapylton is Brutus."

"Oh! oh! go it Jack—pitch into him—that's

right, my boy. Ho! ho! your arm's shaking, Sir—had too much port at dinner—steady's the word. So these Romans used to wear petticoats, did they?"

Thus we went, arm in arm, so to speak, through the Picture-gallery: the old sailor asking all his questions at the top of his voice, as though he were on the quarter-deck; and bestowing the full benefit of his natural criticisms on the public.

When it was over, and that the guests had flocked into the drawing-rooms and were beginning to dance, I sought for Ellice everywhere. But my patience was sorely tried by finding myself unexpectedly *Tarragoned* in a doorway. May it be laid to my account, as an act of Christian self-denial and charity, that I convoyed the Spinster-Dragon to the tea-room.

"Really, Mr. Esdaile," she began, "I'm surprised to see you here! what in the world brings you? Silly business all this dressing up and sticking into frames: wonder Lady Caroline can be so silly. Stuff and nonsense! fit for children! And have you really got nothing better to do than to come here and look on

at people bobbing up and down a room like so many grasshoppers? Ah! there goes Mr. Jack and Miss Linda. The Admiral is a great idiot to let *that* go on. But it's the same with 'em all,—the Squire, and Mrs. Halliday, and Lady Caroline; all these fathers and mothers—they do make such fools of themselves and of their children, too! They're at the bottom of all the miseries in life: that's why I never would marry. If I'd been a mother, I should have been as silly as any of them. It's only because I'm unmarried, that I'm a sensible woman! Who has Miss Ashford got hold of? Oh! Lord Dumpling, is it? Good heavens! Is that the way young women dance now-a-days? Is that the fashion, Mr. Esdaile? Sprawled over her partner's shoulder as if she were hanging over a balcony. And look at Clementina Halliday,—now just *look* at her! What a saucy minx that is! Come, Mr. Esdaile, get me a cup of tea. If you will come to these places, try and make yourself useful if you can—come!”

—

Not until the Tarragon has fastened upon Colonel Shaddock in the tea-room, am I justi-

fied in leaving her. Then, with a feeling of thankful relief, I dart away, and, passing through the conservatory, come unexpectedly upon Faust and Marguerite among the orange trees. It was nearly a quarter of an hour before I found Ellice seated in the furthest room with Philip Stapylton.

"I had no idea you were here," I said to him; "where have you concealed yourself all the evening?"

"Merit is ever overlooked," he replied with a smile. "I came here expressly to see Miss Montacute. We have had a long talk, and now I will resign my place to a worthier than I. It is getting late, and I have to walk back."

"Stay a little longer, and we will perform half the journey in company. You see I am so seldom dissipated, that I can't be moderate, and——"

But Chillington came up to claim Ellice for a quadrille.

"We shall be going when it is over," she said to me; and thus deprived of my only inducement to remain, I put my arm in Philip's, and we walked away.

“That is a very remarkable girl, Esdaile.”

“Have you only just discovered that?” I said, almost angrily. “I had supposed, as you came here expressly to talk to her, that your discernment was not so much in fault.”

“I have never had an opportunity of seeing so much of her before. She is not very demonstrative: we have generally talked of books, and I have found her sensible and unaffected. But women seldom give you anything of themselves, unless it is especially called out by circumstances. That girl has a heart worth winning, Esdaile; but not easily won. Deep, strong, and quiet, — none of your passionate streams boiling over rocks, but one that flows noiselessly on its way; and whatever course it takes, there it will go on for ever. How keen and far-sighted these women are when the question is love! I discussed Jack’s engagement with her sister, and told her, unreservedly, how unlikely it was that he would be able to marry for years. My father is in that state of health that any opposition to his wishes might kill him. He has had very heavy losses, as you know, and he certainly will not hear of Jack’s

marriage. All this I told Ellice Montacute, and more still. I boldly said that my father having failed in his Forsepp scheme with *me*, is now turning to Jack: but I entreated her *not* to let her sister, from any false generosity, release him from his engagement—for it *is* an engagement, though my father will not hear it called so. No, Jack loves the little girl, I sincerely believe: and he is an honorable fellow; he will not give her up, if she holds fast by him, and it will be the saving of him hereafter. But he musn't be free—with my father and mother both at him—no! he is not strong enough for that. My own life, Esdaile, has been sacrificed to the parental authority; I must save Jack, if I can. And I could tell Ellice Montacute this, and speak to her unreservedly, for that girl has a clear well-balanced judgment, and a large heart."

What did I reply? I know not. I felt the blood tingling in my cheeks far more than if he had praised myself. But we had reached the corner of the village, and with a hearty grasp of the hand, he struck across the fields to the Hall, while I turned down the silent

moon-lit street. I dreamt exceedingly pleasant dreams last night! As Lucretius says—

“——in qua ratione fuit contenta magis mens,
In somnis eadem plerumque videmur obire.”

Friday Night, September 3.—I was one of the principal actors in a very disagreeable scene this evening. I had been to that distant part of the parish called Wood's End, to visit a man who is dying, and was returning home in the twilight. My road lay along a narrow lane—not the principal road—that leads from the village to the race-course, and is bounded by high quickset hedges from the Ashford meadows on one side, and from the common (of which the race-course forms part) on the other. This has been the last day of the races, and at an earlier hour the lane was no doubt crowded; now, seven o'clock, it was deserted. I walked quickly, the light fading more and more, yet enough remained to distinguish objects and even faces indistinctly. Suddenly I heard a scream, short and smothered, from the other side of the hedge, and apparently close to me. Then a violent scuffle, a low curse, and the sound of

a heavy fall. I sprang up the bank, beat down the hedge as best I could with my stick, and leapt over. Not many yards from me, a short thickset man was struggling to prevent a woman who was on the ground from rising. With one hand he pressed her shawl over her mouth, with the other he held her down. I saw at a glance that he was twice as powerful as I, and it was not a moment to argue with the ruffian: there was but one thing to do. Seizing the back of his neck, I dragged him off, and sent him spinning into the hedge. The man was drunk, and as he recovered his legs and rushed blindly upon me with the howl of an infuriated beast, I planted a well-aimed blow full in his face, which made him again reel back. But he was not to be disposed of so easily. Though the blood streamed freely from his face, he charged once more, head downward this time, and, before I was aware of it, his long powerful arms were round me. In wrestling with him, I should have had no chance; but his unsteady footing and an old school trick saved me. Slipping my leg through his, we both came heavily down together. I

was uppermost, not that it signified, for the brute was stunned by his fall, and lay motionless. I then sprang up and ran to the woman, who was sitting on the ground crying violently. I was much shocked when I recognised her. It was Mrs. Hurst. Her bonnet crushed, her shawl torn, trembling, and too frightened even to rise, but not hurt. I helped her up, and gave her my arm to conduct her home, intending to come back and look after the prostrate man. But half articulate curses already evinced his returning consciousness, and I hurried the terrified woman away; not, however, before I had turned to give a parting look at the man's face, which I thought I also recognised.

"How did this happen, Mrs. Hurst?" I asked, when time and distance had tranquilised her somewhat. "How came you to be there? and do you know the fellow?"

"No more than the babe unborn, sir. I was a walking home, as I have done oftentimes of an evening, sir, across the common, not thinking nothink, for this is a quiet place, sir, except it be in these race times, and no harm comes to folks generalwise; and so, on a sudden,

I see that drunken beast afore me, sir, and he asked me to give him a kiss, and it give me such a turn, that my legs like give way under me, and I couldn't run, the which I did have ought, for he couldn't walk straight, let alone run, and I should have got off. I used to run well a year or two ago; but ye see, sir, I've not been so strong since my baby came, and then when it was took away I got weaker like: it's fullish, I know, to cry and tremble like this, but I can't help it, sir."

"Never mind; but try and have it all out before John sees you: and now here we are close to your cottage, so I will leave you, and return to see after that wretched man."

"Oh! please, sir, don't,—now don't! Let him bide—he'll do well; and mischief might come, sir, if ye go back. You're but young, and not up to such as he: please don't go, sir!"

"You needn't be alarmed, Mrs. Hurst; no harm will come to me. The police station is beyond the spot; and meantime the man is perhaps hurt. I cannot leave him there: he must be taken to the station."

Mrs. Hurst still urged; but finding me inexorable, she turned sharp round, and almost ran home. I walked swiftly back; but, on reaching the common, nothing was to be seen but the blue autumn mist lying in the hollows; nothing to be heard save the grind of a distant cart on the high road. Perhaps, sobered by his fall and loss of blood, the man had quickly and quietly betaken himself home; perhaps some unusual policeman, passing just when he was wanted, had saved him the trouble of choosing his own road. After carefully examining the ground, I was about to proceed to the station, when I heard some one leap over the hedge, and John Hurst's voice, trembling with passion, cried out,

"Where is he, sir? You haven't let the scoundrel escape? I'll break every bone in his body, if I catch him, the d——d black-guard!"

"Silence, John; I can't listen to this violent language. How came you here? Have you seen your wife?"

"Ax your pardon; yes, and of course she wa'n't going to let *you* tackle him all alone.

Nelly says as you knows him, she thinks. Who is he? If I don't give him such a hiding as his own mother wouldn't know him again. The cowardly brute—bin and tore my old girl's things off her back, and her face scratched, too; I'll murder him, if I catch him. I'll——”

“Come, come, John, no more of this. The man was drunk, and he shall be punished by the law for his assault, if I find him; but not by you. You are much too excited to encounter him, and might actually do what you would repent all your life long. Come.”

I laid my hand on his arm to draw him away, though, to say the truth, I was well pleased to see him at last roused from his lethargy and apparent deadness of feeling.

“No, no, parson,” he exclaimed, almost fiercely: “that's all fine gospel talk for you, but I shan't rest till I have at him, and let the law settle with him afterwards. He be one o' those chaps as drinks at the Sun, I'll bet a crown. Which be he? I won't rest till I find him.”

“Well, then, you must go and look for him there,” I replied, feeling tolerably sure that

there he would not find him; "only I warn you once more not to be carried away by the heat of your anger, John. As to my assisting your search in your present spirit, of course it would be out of the question, even if I were certain that I knew the man's face, which I am not."

After a moment's hesitation, and a surly rejoinder, John sprang over the hedge and strode back towards the village. I then turned my steps towards the police station, but a couple of quiescent policemen smoking their pipes of peace, with a fierce watch-dog, by way of contrast, and a pervading atmosphere of garlic was all I found. The delinquent had neither been seen nor heard of. A thieving gipsey and a cheating thimble-rigger in the adjoining lock-up, were the only fruits of the race-course that had been culled by the police this day. So I returned home, not perhaps very sorry on the whole that the object of my inquiries should escape undetected by John Hurst, as he probably now will. But of this, more to-morrow. My part in the business is not yet terminated.

I was glad to hear this evening that Jack

Stapylton's horse had won the principal race. It will put the Squire into good humor: it will bring a gleam of sunshine into poor little Linda's heart; decidedly, as somebody was to win, I am glad it was Jack.

Saturday Night.—At a reasonable hour—as I innocently imagined—this morning (*i.e.* some three hours after my own breakfast) I walked over to the Castle, and asked to see Count Bismark. I was informed that the Count was not out of his room: the butler adding, apologetically, that the party had been very late at the ball the night before. I sent up my card, begging to know when the Count would be visible. Like a well-bred man of the world he requested that I would walk up to his dressing-room, if I would excuse his receiving me there. And there I found him, looking even handsomer in his Turkish dressing trousers, open shirt and jacket, than as I had hitherto seen him, “a curled and oiled Assyrian bull.” He shook hands, without expressing any surprise at my early visit, offered me a cigar, and drew a chair to the fire, which I declined.

“My object in paying you this early visit,

Count, was to ask you to institute some enquiries relative to your groom, last night: to find out at what hour and in what condition he returned home; and, if you do not object to it, to question him on these points before me. I *believe* him to have been guilty of a dastardly assault on a woman, for which he is amenable to the law: but I am not *certain* of his identity, or it would have been my duty to send up the police here, instead of coming myself. I claim your assistance therefore, Count, in sifting this affair; and it is of course understood that unless I am firmly persuaded of the man's culpability, I will not proceed against him."

I then detailed the circumstances of last night: Bismark leaning with his back to the mantelpiece the while, puffing leisurely at his cigar, and seldom interrupting the narrative with more than a movement of his head or an occasional "So!"

At its conclusion he remarked slowly, perhaps I might say languidly (but then he had been dancing till five o'clock, it is true),

"Ah! these women, Mr. Esdaile, are at the bottom of everything. And when a man has

taken rather more than is good for him, why if he meets——”

“Good heavens! Count Bismark, you don’t mean to palliate the conduct of such a ruffian? If we once accept drunkenness as an excuse, why a man has only to drink in order that he may commit any atrocity with impunity. I cannot believe that you wish to protect and retain in your service—supposing he is guilty—a man who is likely any day to do the same again, or worse.”

“Well, the fellow is a drunken brute, Mr. Esdaile, I admit, but a clever one. He is worth a great deal to me. No one understands a horse like him. I should be sorry to part with him, though he has his weak points.”

“But you cannot place confidence in a man who gets drunk?”

“Oh! he’s never so drunk as not to know what he’s about. He looks sharp enough after my interests.”

“Then your plea for his irresponsibility falls to the ground. Come, let us see the fellow, at all events, and hear what he has to say for himself.”

"I suppose, Mr. Esdaile," said the Count, taking the cigar from his lips with something like impatience, "this is after all only an affair of money. You seem to have given Bill a good thrashing (at least his beauty was much disfigured when I saw him half-an-hour ago, though he did not tell me how), and I hope it will be a lesson to the fellow not to prosecute his love affairs in that fashion. I am very sorry it happened—very sorry indeed—but it can't be helped now; so, if you will give the poor woman this and tell her not to say anything more about it, I shall feel obliged to you."

He drew from his pocket-book a five pound note, and handed it to me. I shook my head.

"You do not understand the character of an honest upright English peasant, Count. He might indeed prosecute by law for the insult offered to his wife, and accept damages, but such a man as Hurst would never take a bribe for his silence, as an equivalent for the injury. The fine awarded by Justice is a very different thing from the premium to a mean-spirited prudence. No, Count Bismark, these people are not so poor but that they would fling back

the money in your face. John Hurst does not know his aggressor, but he will spare no pains to discover him, and will succeed no doubt. If you remain here, as I understand, some weeks, I ask you whether it is not better to let the law take its just and righteous course towards your groom, instead of risking, what I warn you will surely come to pass, a deadly broil between these men?"

The Count looked at his delicate blue-enamelled watch, and then pulled the bell.

"We will send for him if he is in the way. Excuse me for a moment, Mr. Esdaile," and as his flashy valet appeared at the door the Count passed out and held a moment's conversation with that functionary in the adjoining room. On his return he began quickly and adroitly to open out on a variety of topics far removed from the one under discussion, and gave a humorous account of the Dorminster ball. So five—ten minutes,—a quarter-of-an-hour passed by. The valet then reappeared.

"If you please, my lord Count, the *grumes* say that Wuliam rode out on the chesnut *mere* about 'alf an hour ago, upon the London road."

The staircase clock struck twelve: the London train is due at the station at a quarter past. A very distinct suspicion crossed my mind that I had been "done." But humiliating as that feeling always is, I managed to conceal it, as I took my leave, and before I reached home had philosophically made up my mind it was all much better as it was. My opinion of the Count, however, is certainly not raised. I have since had a most polite little note from him, saying that he finds his groom "*misunderstood*" his orders, and has returned to London with the horse that was beaten in yesterday's race.

John Hurst held out his big horny hand when I entered his cottage this evening.

"You'll take my hand token-like that you forgive me, Parson Esdaile. I were unmannerly rude yesternight. You behaved like a man to my Nelly, and thank'ee, sir, for it: and like a man to me also, in trying for to keep me back from murdering that ere chap. It's lucky for him I didn't find him—perhaps for me too, sir."

"I am glad to find you in such a much better

frame of mind, John. I came to assure you that I have spared no pains in trying to discover the man and having him properly punished by law, as he deserves. But he has left the place. I certainly should have wished him to have been made an example, but as it is, you will at all events be glad to know that the village no longer harbours this unknown ruffian."

John looked at me for one moment—it was but one—as though doubtful whether I was not playing off some pious fraud on him. Then, holding out his hand again,

"I believe you, sir: and God bless ye. You're one o' the right sort, as teaches the difference atween justice and revenge: for with such as me, when one's blood's up it's all the t'other. But you've done me good now, you have: more than all the preaching, 'cause I sees you're in earnest; so I don't mind coming to church to-morrow particular, if you likes it."

Of course I said I did like it; though it was difficult to repress a smile at the way in which John conferred this mark of his approbation on me as the highest possible favor. I

took care to add that, if he came once to please me, I hoped he would return weekly to please himself. And so we parted.

Monday, September 6.—I cannot recover from my surprise at the singular coincidence and revelation consequent upon it, which have been made known to me this day. I wish to write down the facts while they are all fresh in my mind: for they are remarkable enough—the scene being our peaceful little village—to prove that truth is often “stranger than fiction.”

During the morning service yesterday I had observed with some interest the tall figure in mourning who occupied the Priory pew. From my position in the reading-desk I was the only person in church who could see over those high scarlet curtains, where, thickly veiled, sat the solitary lady. At the conclusion of the service she still sat there, patiently waiting for the great tide of the congregation to have passed out. The Castle pew had just emptied itself, as Mrs. Morley slowly drew back the curtains. I had left the communion-table and was walking down the aisle to the vestry. Immediately in front of me, Count Bismark brought up the

rear of the Ashford party, which was slowly defiling out of church. It was at this moment the scarlet curtains were moved aside and the tall figure stepped out into the aisle between me and the Count.

A moment afterwards I heard a low stifled sound, something between a sob and a scream, and Mrs. Morley caught hold of an open pew-door. She would have fallen had I not been immediately at hand to support her, and she trembled so violently that I was glad of the sexton's assistance to get her into the vestry. The Church, meantime, had emptied. One or two stragglers came up to ask if they could be of any use, and Colonel Chillington turned a languid eye upon the obscure female who had thought fit to faint; but the carriages were waiting and the party moved off, I am thankful to say, leaving Mrs. Morley to my care: for the Rector, with his Sunday's early dinner awaiting him, had bustled off before I had reached the vestry. So there, upon a hard chair beside the open window with a glass of water before her, sat Mrs. Morley, very pale, but wonderfully handsome now that I saw her

face, with lips tightly compressed, silent and motionless. I had despatched the Sexton for her maid and for Mr. Julep, and in the meantime all I could do was to try and induce her to drink some wine. She only shook her head; then after a while it sank slowly between her hands upon the table, and there, oblivious probably of everything around, her heart charged with bitter memories, she remained until the opening door aroused her. She then rose and for the first time addressed me. It was a common expression of thanks, but the tone rings in my ears still: there is a thrilling sadness about it "far above singing." She was strong enough to walk home with her maid's arm: she was obliged to me but she required no other assistance. To-morrow, however, if I would call on her, she should be glad to see me. And when Julep, armed with a medicine-chest, appeared, she resolutely declined his assistance, and glided out followed by her grim domestic.

"Hysteria, sir: a highly nervous subject; much the same case as last week, I doubt not—a sudden prostration of the system—but obstinate, sir—a true woman, eh? very obstinate. Told

her she should drive out daily: wouldn't hear of it. Offered that Mrs. Julep should come and cheer her up a bit: positively refused. Fine eyes, eh? Mr. Esdaile: monstrous fine woman altogether, *I* think. Ah! well, I see you are anxious to be off. 'Three services a-day! God bless my soul! Hard work for the lungs, that. Good morning.'

And the little man bustled away, leaving me to ruminate on my encounter with Mrs. Morley, as I walked home alone. Of my conjectures and reflections it boots not now to write, seeing that they are more than twenty-four hours old, and that in the interim I have gained a clear knowledge of those things whereon I speculated.

The Priory is a melancholy house, and its drawing-room, albeit it looks upon a pretty quaint old garden, is a melancholy room. A cedar, growing close to the window, throws its baneful shadow right across the floor, and the diamond-shaped flags of the terrace outside are enameled with a close green moss that tells of dripping boughs and of the rare influence of sunshine. Within this room, with its paper once sky-blue now faded to sea-green, against

which her black dress formed a contrast such as the Venetians loved to paint, sat Mrs. Morley ; her back to the light, her feet on a low stool near the fire, a packet of letters on the table at her side. I had a better opportunity now of examining her face and figure than under a bonnet and cloak. She is apparently rather more than thirty, but has already lost all the bloom of youth, which often lingers round a happy woman to a much later period. Her eyes are singularly lustrous, but, unless when animated, the clear brown iris is half veiled under thick black lashes : and during the whole of our long interview it was only occasionally that she permitted the fire that trembles beneath them to flash forth. The outline of the features is remarkably handsome : the mouth somewhat large, perhaps, but one of the most expressive I have ever seen. Hers is a *sensitive* upper lip—I can convey my meaning by no other word—over which hover the shadows of a thousand fleeting emotions long before they are expressed in words—perhaps unexpressed at all. The slight tall figure, more graceful than perfectly built, the thin feverish hand, the

finely-formed head with its wealth of raven hair, gathered carelessly (perhaps a woman would call it untidily) into a silk net, I translated into so many indications of a highly-wrought, passionate temperament,—a sympathy with great and noble things, and that restive imagination which ever tends to make a woman unhappy in the dead level of ordinary life. But that she has learned to endeavour to conceal her emotions in some measure was shown by her manner throughout this interview. Though speaking of things which she felt with all the passionate energy of a strong nature, she was, to outward appearance, calm enough. Her voice occasionally quivered, her fingers often wound and twitched about the fringes of her dress; but there were no wild bursts of tears, such as Mr. Julep might have led me to expect. Either she exhausts these in her solitude, or, what I think more likely from what I see of her, they come upon her suddenly, unexpectedly, like the snapping of a cord after a long and undue tension.

When I was seated and the door had closed on the old butler, she said,

“I did not ask you to call, Mr. Esdaile, that I might thank you for your kind attention yesterday. I could have done that perhaps as well by a note, without breaking the rule I laid down when I came here, that I would receive no visitors, without exception. I have been led to do so in this instance by a singular and painful circumstance.”

I bowed, not seeing clearly what reply to make; and, after a pause, she continued,

“Did it occur to you, Mr. Esdaile, that there was any particular reason for my being taken so suddenly ill yesterday? Or are you aware that any one in the church accounted for it?”

“I—I—fancied it was possible that you recognized some face you knew; but as I alone was near you at the time, I feel sure that no one else can have thought so.”

“You were right. It was the unexpected sight of one who has been the cause of a burthen of suffering to me that I shall carry to my grave; and it is about him I would speak to you. The sacred character of your office enables me to do so unreservedly, Mr. Esdaile.

The person to whom I allude is Count Bismark. Are you personally acquainted with him?"

"I am."

"Can you tell me what he is doing here?"

"He is staying at Sir Richard Ashford's. He is a great friend of the family, and has been down here before."

"Lady Caroline Ashford, I believe, is not young. Has she a grown-up daughter?"

"She has; but if you ask the question as relative to the Count, she is not a person likely to attract him,—a very insipid young lady."

"What can be his object then" (as though half speaking to herself) "in remaining here? He would consider it a waste of time, without some special object in view. Do you know the character of the man whom Sir Richard receives as an intimate friend into his family circle?"

"I know very little of Count Bismark, except that he is handsome, agreeable, and evidently all that is meant by 'a man of the world.' As to the inducement he finds in remaining here, I am afraid I can account for it by the undisguised admiration he shows for a young lady

in this village, to whom it is likely to prove only a source of disappointment and misery.”

“That it will, indeed!” said Mrs. Morley bitterly. “She is probably neither rich nor nobly born.”

“Even so. She is the youngest daughter of an old Admiral, with little besides his pay.”

“Then he will never marry her, and my suspicions are too well justified. Bismark is a man utterly without principle, Mr. Esdaile, and the most dangerous admirer such a girl can have. He has been the spoilt child of fortune, accustomed to gratify every whim, to indulge every passion. Except in the excitement of such a pursuit as this, he is never happy, and, I believe, no considerations would restrain him from its attainment. He is not without good qualities — is capable of kindness, generosity, perhaps even sacrifice occasionally; but the cultivation of self has leavened the whole man beyond recal. He has never yet felt a true devoted love for any woman, but has frittered it away in a dozen counterfeits. You must save this girl, Mr. Esdaile, and to this end I must tell you something of my own terrible past, that you may

warn her while there is yet time. The name I bear, as perhaps you may have guessed, is assumed. But before I tell you who I am, I require a solemn promise that you will *never* reveal my real name. Painful as it must be to touch upon portions of my past life, I shall not shrink from doing so; and of this knowledge you are at liberty to make what use you think best; but for the sake of another, I require that my name should never pass your lips. I tell it that you may the better understand my position, and also test the truth, if you will, of what I am about to communicate. I am the wife of ——.”

I confess I started to hear the name of one of our oldest patrician houses.

“I have been married eight years. I loved my husband truly, passionately—I would say devotedly, but I dare not use that word. I can sincerely declare, however, that I never have loved, nor ever could love, any other man. And he returned my love, though not quite as a romantic girl’s nature demanded. I had expected a more constant companion, I looked for more complete devotion than any woman

has a right to expect, after the early days of her marriage. And so, when, after a few months, my husband entered Parliament—the natural sphere for his great abilities—I slowly awoke to discover that life was not the long summer's day I had looked forward to. I became a secondary object—at least, so I thought—secondary to the great schemes for his country's legislation which occupied my husband's mind. I was left all day alone. Sometimes he returned to dinner; sometimes a hurried line from the House desired me not to wait for him, and it was often one or two in the morning before he came in. This is only what numbers of other young wives have to bear patiently; but they are not constituted as I was, or they have children on whom to pour out some portion of their hearts, and to divert their thoughts into another pure and healthy channel. In another class of life, again, I know that many a young wife bears her lot of solitude or neglect resignedly; but to such the necessity of each hard day's work is an inestimable boon: she has not time to sit with folded hands, and murmur at her lot. Both

these blessings were denied me: I was childless, and I was born to be a great lady. I had never been educated to make interests for myself, and my husband did not teach me. He was glad that I should be amused—as he thought—in the way that most women of his own set found amusement. If I had gone to him and said, ‘All this round of gaiety is very unsatisfying to me, and I want something to *do*; show me in what humble way I can forward any of the great work you have in hand, he would not have appreciated the motive that prompted me. As it was, he encouraged my going out every night by myself; and the life that I detested at first became at last a necessary stimulant in my cheerless solitude. I was miserable; for, having been a spoilt child, I fancied myself neglected, though, had I been wise, I should have better understood my husband’s character, and appreciated his feeling for me. From his peculiar temperament, and the deep subjects that engrossed his attention, which he naturally considered out of a woman’s province, even when we were together, he was often silent and abstracted. I knew that I had no cause

for jealousy: I sometimes almost wished that I had—a tangible object on which to expend my rage and bitterness; but my husband never looked at any other woman, and in me he had the most blind and perfect confidence,—a confidence, alas! which no one human being has a right to place in another.

“It is one condition of our nature, I believe, that the feelings, like the body, undergo a sure but gradual change. No one’s mind remains in the same state for very long. After the first few years of my married life, abandoning myself to what seemed the inevitable course of things, I grew callous, almost desperate, in my search after excitement. I was too proud to complain. If *he*, on the rare occasions when he spent the evening at home, preferred his study and his dry papers to my society, *I* could now order my carriage, and find society elsewhere. The time was, when I should have cried myself quietly to sleep; that time was past, though, even now, God knows, upon the smallest hint that he wished it, I would gladly have given it all up, and have followed him into seclusion anywhere.

“It was at this time that I made the acquaintance, unfortunately, of Count Karl Bismark. The most popular, the most admired man in all London, as great a favourite with men as with women, it was impossible that I should not find his society agreeable when he showed—but in the most respectful and delicate manner—his marked preference for mine. He is far beyond the vulgar vanity of liking a woman to be talked about in connection with him, and he studiously avoided allowing his attentions to be too evident to the world. But to me, who was now unused to this silent watchful sort of attention—the most seductive of all kinds of flattery—it was pleasant, and I thought harmlessly so. For I knew that my heart was perfectly safe. And here was the danger and the wrong. I am ashamed to speak of it—to think of it now. Had I not felt perfectly secure of myself, as I thought, I should never have ventured to play with such edge tools. And it was a double wrong deserving of heavy punishment, that, feeling thus secure, I did not at once discourage a growing passion that God forbid I should ever have returned. You

cannot feel half the loathing of this ignoble vanity, this miserable craving for something which every true wife should blush to receive, that I myself feel now. My punishment is heavy: yes, Mr. Esdaile, very heavy for one so young as I am, with such a long, long road before her, but it is not a bit heavier than I deserve.

“It was towards the end of a London season that I first knew Count Bismark. We were going abroad shortly for my husband’s health, which had suffered from the hard work of a long session. A few evenings before our departure Count Bismark asked me if it was decided to which of the German baths we were going, and I answered Carlsbad. He made no other remark than that it was a pretty place, and less infested than others of the kind with French and English *canaille*. We went there: and I was in hopes that now at least I should have had my husband to myself, for a relaxation from books and writing was much recommended for him. But he found at Carlsbad a number of foreigners of diplomatic eminence, whose acquaintance he was glad to have an opportunity of making, and in whose con-

versation he was much interested. I was foolish enough to feel disappointed and hurt when he left me to walk up and down those tiresome walks, discussing the affairs of Europe with an Austrian or Russian diplomatist; and, just when I was beginning to think the place insupportably odious, Count Bismark appeared upon the walks one morning. He made no allusion to his expectation of finding us, but a woman's penetration was not to be deceived by his plea of health. It was the line he invariably adopted, I afterwards found, that of not alarming by an unnecessary demonstration of his motives. I found him more agreeable than ever: so much knowledge of the world, such a perception of the beautiful as well as of the humorous, and so easy and apparently perfectly natural: but it was my intellect, not my heart, that was interested, and my vanity alone that was touched. A Viennese lady—the only one I knew well—smiled very knowingly when I asked her about Bismark. He was a sad *mauvais sujet*, she said, but everyone liked him, only he had such an *Anglomanie* now, that they saw very little of him at Vienna: doubtless he found

particular attractions in England. My husband, who had hardly known Bismark before, submitted, like all the rest of the world, to the charm of his influence.

“‘What a pity,’ he said, ‘that clever fellow should idle his life away without an object! He has a great deal of ability, and, with determination, he might do anything he chose.’”

“I remember starting at the particular words used, for I could not doubt but that, in one sense, he *had* an object, though he would never, never succeed in it. I urged my husband, however, that very day, to leave Carlsbad, as soon as the doctor would allow him. I said it was getting cold, and made other excuses for my desire to be back in England. I was, in fact, becoming frightened,—uneasy, for the first time, at the consequences of a danger I had courted. On parting with the Count, I purposely avoided giving him any clue to our probable winter residence. I said, if my husband’s health was not re-established, we should not be in London at the beginning of the session, and I parried his adroit questions to discover where we were likely to be.

“We returned home. My husband found that he must visit his father’s estates in Ireland. But when I proposed accompanying him, with the assurance that I did not mind sleeping in a cabin, if necessary, he threw so many obstacles in the way, that I saw he evidently would prefer my remaining at home, though he was too kind to say so exactly. But it was such kindness as one shows a child. Oh! that he would only have made me his companion! I was thrown back now as before on my own foolish and sensitive feelings.

“Instead of my remaining alone in London, he wished me to go down to his uncle, the Duke’s, to pass the few weeks of his absence. He promised to meet me there at Christmas. There was a large party in the house: everybody except myself was, or managed to appear to be, very gay. I believe, and, strange to say, I now *hope* that I was set down universally as having a bad temper. It was not conceivable that a wife should fret at her husband’s going to Ireland without her. No: I did not receive as much attention as I expected, and that was the reason of my ‘sulks.’ I actually

overheard a lady saying this one morning: and it did not increase my disposition to make myself agreeable. The only moments of real unalloyed pleasure I had, were when hearing my husband spoken of in terms of the highest respect and admiration by several public men who were staying in the house. I felt a glow of pride—which has since turned to shame and heaviness of heart, alas!—when I read his name, coupled with renown and honor, in the papers. But this state of things was not to continue for ever. Ten days before my husband's return there was a fresh importation of guests from town. On coming down to dinner that day, the first person I recognized in the drawingroom was Count Bismark. Nothing could be more natural: the *bien venu* in every country house, why should he not be here? Nevertheless, the blood rushed into my face, and had not the room been so ill-lit my confusion must have been remarked. He handed me into dinner, but only alluded to meeting me here, as a happy *accident*. He avoided in any marked way singling me out from the other women for especial attention;

but when one is under the same roof there are a thousand little circumstances during the day, that enable a man to show tacitly what the feelings are he dare not evince more openly. Whether by a prevision and clever calculation of chances and of my peculiar nature, I know not, but he could not have timed his arrival more opportunely, to be welcome to me. I was heartily sick of the cold uninteresting people by whom I was surrounded: my husband's family, indeed, I never cared for much. But a month earlier the recollection of my Carlsbad misgivings would have been too fresh in my mind for me not to have seen Bismark with apprehension. In the interim I had laughed at myself for the folly of avoiding the *friendship* of an exceedingly agreeable person, when I was so secure of my own heart, and so convinced that no man was comparable to my own husband.

“Why do I linger on these varying shades of feeling, Mr. Esdaile? Why do I dwell on every incident of that time? That by understanding, if possible, something of the weak, passionate, wayward woman before you,

you may more thoroughly appreciate the character of the man with whom you have to deal.

“My husband at last returned, and I was overjoyed. But such is the inconsistency of our nature, that I was angry with him for not evincing a shade of jealous suspicion at Bismark’s presence. On the contrary, he shook hands with him very cordially: and, after the first short half-hour, I saw less of my husband than he did of the leaders of his party who were staying in the house. And I had not the tact to conceal my vexation. One afternoon, when we were walking, the Duchess asked what had become of my husband? she had not seen him all day. I was imprudent enough to reply hastily that no one knew less of his movements than I did, and that I had seen as little of him as herself. I immediately saw the Duchess exchange glances with one or two of the other ladies, which meant very plainly, ‘What a temper she has! and how much he is to be pitied, poor fellow!’ But this was not the worst I had brought upon myself. Bismark, who was present, lost no opportunity

from this moment forwards of alluding to the misery of ill-assorted marriages—of natures that did not assimilate—of the impossibility of a cold unimpassioned character ever appreciating a warm, enthusiastic, and imaginative one. There was nothing in these remarks, so often insisted on, and so adroitly brought to bear on the gossip of every day, that I could reject or resent. And yet, at first I felt angry at being obliged to listen to them: for I knew that my own indiscretion had been the original cause of his adopting this tone. Then by degrees—little by little—I grew accustomed to that abstract talk about sympathies and affinities, until at length I found myself on the brink of making a confidant of the man whom of all others I should most have avoided. I withdrew a step: but the toils of that wary hunter were too securely round me. It was of little moment that the party was breaking up. What had advanced so far in the country would be still better prosecuted in London.

“We all met there in February. Oh, my God! how I hate to think of that last month! It is like a hideous dream: so impressed on

the mind in every detail that one cannot think it unreal; and so unnatural, so *impossible* when one awakes, that one cannot believe it all actually happened! How the man became more and more wound up in my daily life; how in my long hours of solitude I looked to his visit as the one excitement of the day, till it became a species of dram-drinking that I could not live without—all this crept on me stealthily, and gradually, before I perceived the change in our relative positions.

“There was great distress in the manufacturing districts just at that time, which occupied my husband’s thoughts entirely. At night he often returned worn out in body, yet his energetic mind not permitting him to rest. He would throw himself down on the sofa, then start up and pace the room, muttering, as he revolved in his mind how the misery of the people was to be alleviated. *My* misery he never noticed. What was there I had not? Generous to me as he was self-denying to himself, he knew that he had never left a whim of mine ungratified. It would never have occurred to him that I *could* be unhappy.

I was handsome, not without some talent; made, he thought, to shine in the world; I had no business to be unhappy, since I had everything this world could give. Oh! if he could only have seen my heart at that moment—its restless, uneasy, miserable state! But he saw nothing: and so the end at last came.

“I sprained my foot in getting out of the carriage one evening. A doctor was sent for, who said it was nothing very serious; but I passed the night in great pain, and felt ill and nervous in the morning. My husband entered my room early, with some letters in his hand. He said he was going down to Nottingham that evening to see about the poor weavers there, and that he should be back the following day, when he hoped to find me much better.

“‘Don’t go,’ I could not help saying; ‘pray don’t leave me, Charles, don’t.’

“He looked very much surprised, and said,

“‘Why, my dear Carry, what *do* you mean? You’re upset and nervous, my poor child; but you are surely not serious in wishing me to remain here, because you’ve sprained your ankle, when hundreds of your fellow creatures are

dying, and the object of my going is to try and save their lives?’

“I could only reply by a sort of hysterical sob, as my husband kissed me, and said he had just ordered a new carriage for me, the step of which he hoped I should find more convenient. Never was gift so ungraciously received: it was like giving a sugar-plum to a child to pacify it, I thought. If my husband was disappointed at the way in which I received this, he certainly didn’t show it, but left the room, saying that, as he was on a committee, and should be kept at the House till late in the afternoon, he should not return home, but desire his valet to meet him with his things at the terminus. And so we parted.

“Bismark, I knew, would call in the afternoon, so I got up, though in pain, and managed to crawl down to the drawing-room, with my maid’s arm,—restless, nervous, craving for some excitement, anything was better than my own thoughts. I lay on the sofa in the back room, and desired that any visitors should be admitted; but none came. It began to grow dusk, and I grew more nervous and irritable every mo-

ment, wondering what could have kept Bismark, and with strange inconsistency, as I perfectly remember, upbraiding my husband with his neglect. At last there was a knock at the door. The butler brought in the lamp, and announced Count Bismark. I tried in vain to conceal all traces of agitation. I felt my voice tremble as I greeted him, and my eyes were red and swollen. He sat down by my sofa, and, with that peculiarly soothing musical voice, drew from me, in spite of myself, what I most wished to conceal—that I felt wretched and lonely, that my husband, who did not understand my foolishly sensitive nature, had left London, and that the sympathy of a friend was a great comfort.

“I believe he cunningly chose this moment to look at his watch, get up, and declare that he must be going—he was engaged to dinner. It was all arranged beforehand, I’m sure—his coming so late; for he had one of our servants in his pay, I afterwards discovered, and must have known of my husband’s absence. So there he stood, holding my hand in his, bidding me ‘good-bye.’

“‘So soon?’ I said: ‘you have not been here half-an-hour.’

“‘If *you* ask me to stay, it is enough;’ that was his reply.

“And thereupon followed such a flood of passionate eloquence, as only men like Bismark have at their command at these moments. He was upon his knees, calling me ‘Caroline,’ and urging me no longer to sacrifice my whole life to one who was incapable of appreciating me. Let him, at least, whose soul beat in unison with mine have some share, some corner in my existence, for the ties of the heart were the only real ones—with other such sophistries as these.

“To my eternal shame, I let him hold this language—God forgive me! I was bewildered, —conscious, for the first time in my life, that I was passionately loved; but confused, stunned, only half conscious of the wrong. My hands remained in his, my head almost drooped upon his shoulder, while he poured out his vehement words.

“Suddenly I was aware of a shadow crossing the lamp. . . .

“I look up and shrieked. . . . My husband stood between the folding doors!

“You may imagine better than I can describe, Mr. Esdaile, the scene that followed. I threw myself on my knees, I trailed myself at his feet. Never shall I forget the look of despair in his face, Bismark’s rage, and the few terrible words that passed between them! . . . I know not how it terminated, for nature at last came to my help, and I fell fainting on the floor. I had a succession of these fits, and the doctor and my maid were with me the greater part of the night. Once I opened my eyes and saw my husband writing in the room, and then I fell into a deep sleep, which lasted till morning.

“My first thought was to inquire for my husband, as the terrible events of the previous night came crowding back on my mind. The maid handed me a letter, and my heart sank within me. This is it.”

And, taking one from the table, she read what, as far as I can remember, was to the following effect. It was dated midnight.

““ After the discovery I accidentally made

last night, Caroline, of course all is at an end between us. God and your own conscience know how far your protestations of innocence are true. As to actual guilt, I wish to believe them; as to a long course of duplicity, and the encouragement, at least, of this man's passion, I cannot. But what *I* believe, signifies little; your reputation in the eyes of the world, at all events, shall not suffer. A home where confidence is once destroyed, is a home no longer: you would be miserable, fancying yourself always watched; I, probably, should be ready to interpret innocent acts wrongly. Therefore it is necessary we should part; and we do so, remember, from *incompatibility of temper*. We may, indeed, say that with truth! This shock is too recent for me to review my conduct as rigidly and impartially as I may do hereafter. If I have been to blame, forgive me: you know that I had the most unbounded confidence in you. It is for ever shaken in woman—God forgive you! I would sooner have plucked out my two eyes than have seen what I did last night. I shall carry the bitter fruit of that experience to my grave. You need

not fear my avenging my honour, as it is called, by fighting a duel. Were I not deterred upon far higher grounds, the fear of your name coming thus before the world, would prevent me. I have loved you, Caroline, better than you thought; but my nature is not a demonstrative one.

“ ‘ When this reaches you, I shall be on my road to Nottingham, where I was prevented going yesterday by a mere chance. I shall not return to London until I hear what you propose doing. If you wish to remain in this house, it is yours; and, whether you do so or not, I shall make such arrangements for your comfort as will prevent your feeling, I hope, any *outward* change in your position. As far as I can see my way at present, this seems the right course for me to pursue, and I act on it at *once*, to spare you the needless trial of another agitating scene. Justification, recrimination, or self-reproaches, are alike useless. Only lay this warning to heart, Caroline, and may it keep you from further danger.

“ ‘ Your truest friend and sorrowing husband,

“ ‘ _____.’

“I cannot describe to you,” continued Mrs. Morley (as I must still call her), “the effect this letter produced on me. I was stunned. I could not believe for a long time that it was really true, and that I was separated for ever from him. If he could have known the agony of my mind, I think he would have had pity on me. I tried to write. Of what use was it to assure him that I loved him far more than ever, that in my heart of hearts I had never swerved in my allegiance to him? How could I expect him to believe it? It sounded monstrous, incredible; and scalding tears blotted the words as I wrote them. Then I abandoned myself to paroxysms of remorse, and reproach towards the cause of all this misery. As regarded *him*, the revulsion of feeling was complete. A scale seemed to have fallen from my eyes. I now saw him in his true colours, and shuddered to think that I had ever listened to him with complacency, ever tolerated his false insidious sentiment. His words had lost all charm. To the numberless notes he wrote me in the course of the next few days, I only replied in the brief cold terms necessary to

show him my true feelings. Most of those notes I burned as soon as read; but one I kept. Here it is. I was actuated by the hope that my husband might some day know——”

She broke off, and handed me the note, written in his minute foreign hand, but admirably expressed in English, somewhat as follows:—

“You reject my offers, and do great injustice to my true sentiments, most adorable of women! As you refuse to fly with me and share the existence of one whose future should be entirely given up to you, what is it you expect from your husband? Not forgiveness and reconciliation? You know his cold hard nature too well. I have offered him satisfaction, but he refuses it: does he then intend procuring a divorce? As I cannot believe that your affections any longer belong to one (though you persist in asserting so) who has treated you for years with such studied neglect, I must think that you will regard this divorce as a release, and that you will no longer refuse the love and protection of him who can then offer you an honorable *name*. If this is so, gladly

shall I hail the day, whenever it come, that I may be permitted to claim you as my wife. And to this I hold myself *bound by every tie of heart and of honour*. I feel with sorrow that you are now suffering from my imprudence and impetuosity. I only await the word that shall call me to your side.

“B.”

“You may imagine,” continued Mrs. Morley, after a pause, “I was not long in making up my mind that if I was to be separated from my husband—and I could not demur at the justice of his decision—I was better out of London: altogether away, where he would not be subject to the annoyance of seeing or hearing of me. Almost broken-hearted, I quitted his roof, acquainting him with my immediate plans in a letter in which I made no appeal to his feelings, nor attempted to induce him to revoke his sentence. I was too thoroughly humbled with the consciousness of my own vanity and folly, and of my unworthiness to be his wife, for me to dare to plead even the excuses I have done to you, Mr. Esdaile. The only thing I assured him was, that my future life should be one against

which no breath could be raised. I begged him to institute the strictest enquiry, in order to satisfy himself that however much she had sinned, the lesson his unhappy wife had learnt was not thrown away. And, greatly with this view, I requested that two old family servants, a butler and housekeeper, might accompany me in my wanderings. They have done so ever since—eight months, which have seemed like years, and have changed me from a young to a middle-aged woman, Mr. Esdaile!

“I travelled abroad. I have, literally speaking, wandered up and down the face of the earth, never stationary for more than two days together in any place. I have never made any new acquaintances; I have shunned the old ones whom chance threw in my way. I had the satisfaction, through all this, of knowing that I was regarded as a disagreeable, violent-tempered woman, from whom my husband had found himself obliged to separate. But at last I was worn out with this life—spent in mind and body, and only desirous of *rest*. This I found it almost impossible to have under my old name. I took a house for a few weeks

in the summer at a place where I was personally unknown, but my husband's name brought troops of visitors to my door, invitations and offers of assistance, which fairly frightened me away. It was then I bethought me of the simple plan which I have successfully adopted hitherto, to escape this kind of invasion. If the question, 'Who is she?' cannot be satisfactorily answered, one is always safe in England. I chose this part of the country, because I knew no one here: neither has my husband any connections in the neighbourhood. The unknown Mrs. Morley, therefore, was likely to escape notice. Little did I anticipate the strange improbable coincidence of meeting that man whom of all others I should least wish to know of my being here!

"Of him I have only to add further, that three months after that fatal evening he fought a duel at Baden, with a French officer, about the wife of the latter. This is the man against whom you must warn every woman whom he selects for the amusement of the hour. His life is made up of such aims, alas! It is an exciting sport, this gambling with human hearts,

and every game won increases the passion for it. Yet this man originally was made for better things. He *had once* a heart, if it had ever been fired with an earnest enduring love. Now I fear it is altogether corrupt. Vanity, success, sensuality, have brought him to be what he is. And it is the horror I feel when I remember all the misery he has brought, not only on me, but on many another happy home, that has made me go over the painful history of my past, Mr. Esdaile. It is a bitter trial to speak of it. I have never done so to a human being. But if, with all its terrible consequences to me, it may prove a warning to any other woman, I feel I ought to let her know it. For God's sake, Mr. Esdaile, speak to this girl or to her father. Tell them that the vows Bismark has probably ere now poured forth to *her* have been made to twenty other women. Tell them if you will, in short, all I have told you."

After a short pause I said,

"I will do so: at least I will think over the best means of guarding this young girl. Her disposition, unfortunately, renders any ap-

peal to herself difficult. But I hope and believe such an insight into the character of Count Bismark cannot but have its effect. Your story has deeply interested me: and since you have entrusted me with your secret, you will not think it mere impertinent curiosity, I hope, if I ask whether you have still any communication with your husband?"

"He does write to me occasionally," she said, sadly; "and whether it be that *I* am changed, and better able to understand his nature, I know not, but his letters seem more tenderly anxious for my well-being than I believed at one time possible. Both the servants, whom I may now call old and faithful friends, write to him from time to time and let him know how I go on. I can very rarely bring myself to do so. Or rather I write letters and destroy them. My written words seem to mock and jeer at me. I cannot express to him all I have at my heart. My life of utter seclusion and my broken health must do that."

Soon after this I took my leave, saying that as she had once broken through her rule in my favor, I hoped she would allow me to

repeat my visit occasionally. I added that, from what I knew publicly of her husband's character, I did not think he would regret her having a friend in the clergyman of the parish, to whom she could always apply for counsel and assistance.

This interview has given me matter for much serious thought all to-day. A confession, which, taken by itself, and without reference to the peculiar character of the speaker, sounds hardly credible—that a woman loving her own husband should be on the point of giving herself up to another whom she does *not* love! . . . This suggests the enquiry, how often the honor of a home has not fallen victim to a sort of systematic neglect on the part of many an otherwise excellent man? Public men, especially, often seem to think that their country demands a sacrifice of these sweet humanizing charities: others, overlooking the clear, obvious duties, that lie ready to hand—just because they *are* so clear—go out into the wilderness to hunt and scour about for duties, “calls,” they would say, forgetting that, in a very broad as in a close sense, charity begins at home. Here is

this fine fellow—whom I must call Mr. Morley—a generous advocate of the oppressed, a man who feels keenly the sorrows of his fellow men, energetic and high principled as we all know. Yet he does not hesitate to leave that sensitive, imaginative woman he has made his wife to pine away with scarce more than the crumbs of affection that fall from his philanthropic soul, after feeding its five thousand. If it be *dulce et decorum pro patriâ mori*, our schoolboys are not taught that the life and happiness of *another* is to be sacrificed on the same altar. But all Englishwomen expect this sort of life when they marry, it is said. Their husbands are in active professions, out on the broad seas, or on the burning plains in India; busy among parchments in the Temple, or with scrip and consol in the City; at all events, comparatively few hours of their *life* can be devoted to the culture of their household gods. And Englishwomen would not wish it otherwise. Their hearts, however, do still look for something of the chivalrous tenderness of old, when their Paladins return after the day's hard fight is over. And the man—I care not whether

senator, priest, or usurer — who does not take “sweet counsel” of that gentle loving creature, who has been anxiously listening for his knock all the evening,—the man, I say, who is so absorbed in his own schemes for good or ill, that he neglects at such rare hours to cherish the light of his dwelling, deserves to find it, as he too often does, extinguished by a rude hand, suddenly and for ever!

My pen has run away with me: a perfect steeple-chase of long periods. However, as it is all true, let it stand.

Now about this Bismark and the Montacutes. What is to be done? Speaking to Ellice is, of course, the first thing that suggests itself. Indeed, I know that, under any circumstances where a woman's heart and keen intuition may be called into council, I should go to her before any one. If my sister ever see these pages she will pardon this, when she learns (probably no one else ever will) that the common lot of all men has overtaken me. Yes, it has come at last: I cannot conceal from myself any longer that I am falling deeply in love with Ellice Montacute. I find myself thinking of

her in all seasons and places: I am ashamed to say, even in church yesterday I found my eyes following my thoughts to that distant pew in the quiet side aisle. I suppose I ought not to encourage these thoughts at *any* time. What has a curate on eighty pounds a-year, with an independent fortune of two hundred more, to do with matrimony? Would she ever think of it, but with pity at my folly? And am I justified, I who preach to others, in rushing blindly into a passionate attachment, and then pleading it in justification of the selfish desire that she should take upon herself all the privations of a very poor man's wife? I fear not. Yet it resolves itself into this. If she really loved me, the privations would be none to her: dearer a thousand times than the solitude of unlove. But the truth is, I can detect in Ellice no symptoms of more than a candid reliant regard, that would apply to me, I hope, in all difficulties, confident in my earnest sympathy. Danger, except to myself, there is none. Not the less, however, now that my eyes are open, should I turn aside bravely and steadily from the peril before me. . . .

To return to Vanda. I cannot believe that when she learns the truth concerning this man, she will persist in continuing an intimacy of such doubtful appearance. Her pride, if nothing better, will revolt against the construction the world will naturally put on this renowned Lothario's attentions. Callous, in a measure, I fear she is: scornfully dashing away the drops as they fall—a temper partly imbibed from her fierce foreign mother, partly grown upon her in contact with a hard world; but not utterly lost, surely, to all tenderness and truth? Unloveable, nay repellent, as the girl's character is, there is one green sweet touch in it—her love for her father. She will read to him, walk with him for hours, and prefers his society evidently to that of her sisters. Whether it is a love that would sacrifice anything—would even yield him implicit obedience is perhaps doubtful—remains to be proved. Seldom has been put to the trial, I should think; the Admiral, except in veriest trifles, never dreaming of controlling his favourite darling. I have not much hope, therefore, of working any good by an appeal to “the foolish fond old man,”

which must, however, be made. But first, to lay some facts in this sad story before Ellice.

7 a.m., *Wednesday*.—I have been sorrowfully and most unexpectedly employed during the last twenty-four hours. Up all last night. Now in the early morning, while the little maid is preparing my breakfast, I sit down to note hurriedly the event that has personally affected me so much—more than I could have believed possible a few weeks ago. I called at Sunny Cove early on Tuesday, intending to speak to Ellice. Found the little household all in confusion: runnings to and fro, doors open, and a sound as of sobs from the upper floor. The Admiral had had a very alarming fit: lay, it was feared, between life and death. His daughters, of course, were with him, and I sent to ask if they would like me to see their father. After a few minutes I was shown up into a tiny cabin of a room where the old sailor lay, his face much drawn and haggard, the eyes fixed with intensity on the low sloping wall opposite. On that wall was pinned the water colour sketch of a young and handsome woman: I noticed it and the other details of

the room, not then, but as I sat beside him through that long afternoon. The chest, still marked "*Captain Montacute*," with its great brass clamps, rusted with sea air and spray in many a distant voyage; the old-fashioned sword and compass hung above; even that skeleton washing-stand, and the hand-glass swinging over it, all had a color of the man's former life. At the pillow, her hands in his, her head in the counterpane, over which the black hair fell unbound, knelt Vanda—silent, motionless, save when the slight figure shook with an inward sob—a very touching sight, I thought, remembering her hard habitual aspect. Poor Linda in tears, hurrying to and fro with medicines and what not: Ellice in close earnest conference with Julep in the recess of the little casement—that was the group as I entered. I approached the latter, and Ellice turned to me at once, calm and collected, but with the shadow of a heavy grief, or at least alarming anxiety, on her brow and the least tremble in her voice.

"The immediate danger is over: he is sensible now, and I shall be glad for you to speak to him—to sit with him."

“*If* he have not another attack, and have strength to rally,” said Julep in a whisper, “he *may* do. I keep the young ladies up, sir, as much as I can. No use in letting ’em down, poor things: but don’t you go for to let the old gentleman think he’ll ever be quite himself again. Bring him up smart, sir, about his religion while he’s got time: bad case! no knowing——”

And I turned from the man of medicine to the sick bed, beside which his daughter had set a chair for me. Instead of “bringing him up smart,” I spread a Bible and read to him such passages as I thought best suited to his shaken wavering frame of mind. I doubt whether his thoughts followed them; they were probably wandering far back into the past, or turning to his favourite child, for when his eyes moved heavily from his wife’s picture, it was to fasten on her living image as she knelt beside him, and then the hard weather-beaten old hand feebly stroked the little one that lay within it. From time to time Ellice or Linda came in with wine or restorative medicines for their father: one or other, indeed,

always remained in the room to bathe his temples with vinegar and watch the fluctuating shadows on his face; but, except for these low rustlings, occasional creaking of door, and whisper interchanged between the sisters, the silence was unbroken.

Thus some hours passed. In the old man's state, I felt that perhaps I was not of much real use, and yet my being there was a comfort to the sisters—two of them, at least, for the third took no cognizance of my presence. Julep came and went. Two serious cases in the village, so he could not stay; but thought, or *said* he thought, more favourably of his patient in the afternoon. Talked of “tone,” “cerebral action,” and so on, but left me painfully unconvinced. Even when the poor old man found strength to thank me in a few words, I did not feel more hopeful: the rough sea-worn voice was so changed and feeble, like a far distant echo of the one I knew. Days—weeks, perhaps, still for him on earth, but they were numbered.

I had only read a few verses at intervals, fearing to tire him: I now asked whether he

would like me to return in the evening and read the Prayers for the Sick with him. He seemed pleased: murmured what, by stooping, I caught to be,

“You’ll try and persuade her to come, eh? Parson.”

I supposed that he referred to Vanda, and was rather surprised, but answered, “Certainly,” though there was evidently no fear of the poor child’s leaving her father’s side.

After some necessary visiting among the sick (which Mr. Brigstock, on account of his children and his wife’s instances I believe, gives over entirely to me), I returned to Sunny Cove between seven and eight in the evening.

“You will find my father better in some respects,” said Ellice, though there was a look in her face that almost belied her words; “his voice stronger, able to sit up and speak, but his head has been wandering. He keeps fancying our mother is outside the door, and will not come in. He entreats her, and will not be pacified, poor dear! and I think he looks to your coming, Mr. Esdaile, to persuade her to enter, and join in the services of the Church,

which she would never do in her life-time. Then he mixes it all up with talk of his sea days; in short, I am afraid he is exciting himself a great deal too much, and I dread another of those fearful attacks. . . . But what is to be done? It is essential to keep up his strength, not to lower it. Mr. Julep is very clever, I believe; and, under any circumstances, the expense of sending to London for a physician—I don't know how we could pay him; and it would excite my father so terribly if he knew it. You think Mr. Julep clever, don't you?"

"I have no doubt he is; and your father's is not a complicated case, I imagine, though a serious one. By-the-bye, would it not be well, on all accounts, to send for his old friend, Colonel Shaddock? If your father has left anything undone relative to—to matters of business, he might like to speak confidentially with him. It will make you happier also, to know that his mind is at ease on these points."

Ellice is not one to start at shadows, when a stern reality is before her. She did not burst into tears at the idea of its being necessary for her father to make his will. She felt too

deeply, I am sure, in Whose hands were the issues of life and death, to have any superstitious dread of meeting the idea of death half way. She sent for Colonel Shaddock, and led me in the meantime to her father's room.

He was leaning up in bed, propped by pillows, and turned with feverish anxiety to the door, as I entered.

"Where is she, Parson? where is she? Can't stay long: got my sailing orders, and time nearly up. Bring her in; *do* now: I've been waiting—waiting—waiting: and now the tide's beginning to ebb, sir. We must heave the anchor. Heave away, boys! yoy-hoy——."

His head sank back, and the voice, which had burnt up to something of the old vigour, died suddenly away. I opened the Prayer Book, and knelt down, when he again muttered in a much weaker voice.

"It's the last time, Van, the last time! I never was much of a hand at praying, but I couldn't bear your Popish mummeries. Can't you pray in our parish church as well as before that bit of wood in your room? No, no; the children shan't—— Come, now; just for

once, Van. Old Aunt Bell 'd like to see us in church together, with her god-child too—come! I'm seldom ashore, and Jack Tar's life is uncertain: perhaps," here his voice was almost inaudible, "we may never meet again, Van—never meet again!"

He ran on for a long time thus. His mind was evidently completely unhinged, and, indeed, so it has continued, more or less, all night. Tranquil occasionally, and always conscious of our presence; but connecting it with scenes and days long passed away,—a coil of shreds and tatters, poor fellow!

Colonel Shaddock's arrival was a great relief to me every way. In the first place, the kindly generous old soldier did what I thought it more than possible he *would* do,—telegraphed to London for the best medical advice, for his own private satisfaction, as he said, "not that I would for a moment insinuate that Mr. Julep is not a most able practitioner, sir; but another opinion is always satisfactory," being almost as sensitive for the little doctor's feelings as Julep could have been himself. Doctor —— will be here this morning by the 11.50 train. The

Colonel remained the greater part of the night with his old friend, in case the latter should wish to speak to him relative to his affairs. I also stayed on the chance of the sick man's needing me: threw myself on a sofa in the drawing-room, and from time to time stole up to the door, and held whispered consultations with Ellice. The little cabin was too crowded as it was: anxious daughters gliding in and out; the Colonel in his arm-chair; the doctor, more grave and anxious since the evening, trying by all means to allay the irritation of the brain. At last, towards morning, by sedatives or otherwise, he fell asleep, and seeing I could be of no immediate service, I returned here for an hour or two. I dare not, alas! hope for more than that the poor old Admiral may have a few days of unbroken peace to wind up his affairs in this world, and to prepare for his long journey to a better one.

Saturday, September 11th, Ten o'clock, a.m.—
It is all over. Happily, as the poor orphan girls will one day believe, though now they are overwhelmed with their sudden sorrow. He never could have recovered to be himself again,

I understand. Had he lived his life would have been a melancholy burthen. Bed-ridden, certainly, the doctors say, and his mind so much impaired, that probably much trial and suffering in all ways have been spared to his children, by God's mercy. Still the blow is no less severely felt—as it is meant to be. Heaven forbid that Christian philosophy should ever steel our hearts *against* affliction, and it has been a heart-rending sight to watch the fading hope in that little household from hour to hour. The London doctor came down on Wednesday. From that time we all knew the fate of the poor old Admiral. Doctor —— did not hold out any deceptive hopes, though only to the Colonel did he speak unreservedly. He confirmed all Julep's views, spoke in the highest terms of his treatment, and left us in a couple of hours: Julep, of course, much gratified, and us with the melancholy satisfaction, that all that mortal skill could do, had been done. The result was in God's hands, and every little symptom was eagerly watched during this and the following days. To the Colonel and myself it was clear, indeed, but

the poor girls clung to their hopes almost to the very last. For one thing we must be forever thankful. The cloud which hung over the dying man's mind, obscuring the sense of his present state with confused images of the past, was dispersed some hours previous to his death, enabling him not only to give clear directions as to his temporal affairs, but to devote his thoughts to the more important future.

* * * * *

He died very peacefully; his heart, I truly believe, is in charity with all men.

Honest simple old sailor! Type of a race that is growing rarer every day, since the universal schoolmaster has boarded ship, and turns out our "naval cadet" an accomplished man of letters, before whom the Admirals of Nelson's time might have stood abashed. I do not object: far otherwise; but the peculiarities of the old English sailor are lost in the change, and there is something of rough tenderness in the character, which was always attractive to me from a boy. Poor old Admiral! I shall think of him with regret for many a

day. Not over-wise, perhaps, in any relation of life; over-indulgent husband and father; dearly loving his bottle of port; reckless in money (as I fear); but withal large-hearted, manly, and attaching. His love and constant recollection of his wife—living again in her likeness, Vanda—was to me almost poetical, in that brown weather-stained old man. The last words from him that were audible (the cloud fell partly on him again at last) were low mutterings to “make haste, for the tide is ebbing fast. Heave the anchor, and bring her head round, boys. A fair wind—and it ain’t a long voyage, Van—so good-bye, my girl, and take care of yourself and of—the—little—little—one——”

His hand was on that “little one’s” head, and thus the old man fell asleep last night at twelve o’clock.

Saturday Afternoon, Six o’clock.—Vanda’s grief is of that wild savage kind that refuses any comfort. Poor Julep, who has felt and shown a real sympathy with them all, was much discomfited when, after the commonplaces usual at these occasions, Vanda fiercely turned

round on him, and in reply to the remonstrance that she was injuring her health, desired him to leave her. What could he or anyone know of her sorrow? The only creature on earth who cared for her was gone. And so on. The others, as might be expected, take their bereavement differently: Ellice's brave heart gave way at first, after the long tension of her nerves, but she has regained something of her accustomed self-control this afternoon; she feels there is so much to be done, and she alone to do it. Would I had the right to lift up this and all other burthens through life, and help her bear them: but I have not. Well, well, patience! But it is hard to see one we love devotedly, suffering as she is, and not say out boldly, "Let me share your sorrows." My heart bled to hear her broken voice, saying,

"It is so desolate to look forward, Mr. Esdaile. I see so many dark clouds a-head, and to meet them all single-handed! . . . He was such a tender, good father"

So he was; and I loved her far better for forgetting how little the poor old Admiral had ever helped her in her struggles with Vanda.

Yes! she has probably many a hard and ungrateful task in store; but that brave, patient heart, leaning on something yet surer for its strength, will carry her through every trial that He may see fit to appoint.

Colonel Shaddock is sole executor of the will. Thoughtful for everything, uniting a soldier's precision with almost woman's delicacy of feeling, he has made the necessary arrangements for the funeral, etc., even down to the girls' mourning, having sent, as he told me, to the neighbouring town for a dressmaker. Feeling I had no right or excuse to remain at Sunny Cove (as I longed from my heart to do), since my services must now yield to the Colonel's, I have only called there occasionally in the course of the day, to learn how the poor girls were.

I have just heard accidentally that the Ashfords are off for Paris in a few days, and that Count Bismark has left the Castle. I am not surprised. In Vanda's present state, his remaining was lost time. Yet I am glad: he must always be a dangerous, never a profitable, neighbour to any of us. During the last few days

I have hardly had time to think of him, except remotely, as of an evil warded off for the present, and become distant. To Ellice, in all her trouble, of course I said nothing of the heavy secret I had in my heart to tell her, before the storm-cloud of her sorrow burst. Time enough for that, and all contingent evils hereafter.

Friday Night, 17th September.—The funeral took place to-day. The three girls followed their father to his grave, and it was touching to see the crowds of poor who were gathered in the churchyard to testify their sympathy and respect. Scattered about among the graves, where probably each one could point to the resting-place of some of his kindred, they leaned on the lichen-covered stones, or talked in low voices over grassy mounds, waiting for that melancholy procession as it slowly wound its way up to the gate. I was glad, for once, that Mr. Brigstock read the service. I could remain unnoticed in the background, with my eyes fixed on that trembling black hood and the little white handkerchief pressed convulsively to the mouth. No sound—no wail! . . .

But as the body was lowered and the earth was closing over it, the tallest, slightest of those three black hoods sprang suddenly forward and leant over, held firmly back, though by another's hand.

That was all. There we left him, under the shadow of the unchanging yews; a green and peaceful spot, such as the old sailor, when tempest-tost, little thought perhaps ever to reach, and may have longed wistfully for, instead of the "heavy-shotted hammock shroud." Ah, well! to him it is now all one; but to those who are left behind, the certainty that those few feet of ground cover all that remains of him *here* is not an indifferent thing. He does not seem quite gone, if they can steal up hither in the quiet sunsets, and know that he is close to them. Poor human nature! so it is. Hard to separate the spiritual from the perishing clay, even to the very last.

I was asked as a friend to be present at the opening of the will. It was short enough. The Admiral had saved very little; the principle source of his income had been his half-pay; and as he was careless in money matters, it

appears that a number of small debts have accumulated, which, when paid, will leave but a very slender income for the girls. Even in their small household there must be reduction, so Colonel Shaddock informs me, adding,

“You see what I should like, would be to beg the poor young ladies to come and make their homes under my roof—plenty of room, sir, and no inconvenience to me. But all things considered, I doubt whether it isn’t better, kinder, to let them remain where they are, and look after them *there*, as well as I can. You see, sir, this is a censorious world, and though I’m an old fellow, it’s as well not to let ill-disposed persons have the opportunity to say malicious things, for the young ladies’ sakes.”

I declared with warmth that it was impossible any one in Ashford could find it in their hearts to say anything malicious about him; but he interrupted me.

“When you have lived as long as I have, Mr. Esdaile, you’ll find it wiser never to brave the world’s opinion, except when you can’t help it. I trust to God, sir, I shall never shrink from doing what I believe to be right, for fear

of the world ; but we mustn't provoke its tongue unnecessarily, sir, especially when the ladies are concerned."

The neighbours, forgetting any little differences, have one and all come forward to testify their sympathy with the poor girls. Sir Richard, the Squire, his sons, and every gentleman in the neighbourhood, attended the funeral ; and even Mrs. Stapylton, I hear, has sent kind messages of inquiry. Nay, to the honour of human nature, be it said, the Halliday girls offered to help make their rivals' mourning (having high mantua-making abilities, it seems) ; and Miss Clemmy showed more of woman's tenderness to-day, when speaking of the Montacutes, than I had thought her capable of.

Thursday, 30th September.—Vanda is very ill. In addition to her sisters' other troubles, they have this anxiety. After much persuasion, she consented to see Julep, and he could not, of course, refrain from observing that *he had told her so—he knew how it would be*, and other retributive remarks of a like consolatory nature. He thinks her chest delicate, but says that with care she will soon be well.

The cow is to be sold, the gardener who looked after it dismissed, and Linda must take his place, she says: perhaps the more occupation each of them now can find the better. Some Indian screens, a cabinet and other foreign objects of value, were to have been sent to London for sale; but the Colonel discovered that they were what he had long wanted, so he has become the purchaser (at a fabulous price); and now, with amusing naïveté, he begs that they may remain at Sunny Cove "for the present," as his drawing-room is not yet ready to receive them,—nor ever will be! The kindly little *ruse* does not of course deceive any one; but Ellice knows it would wound the old gentleman to seem to see through it; and she has the wisdom, I believe, to discriminate between that right kind of pride that struggles through every difficulty to independence, and the false pride that rejects all help from those keenly interested in our welfare. So she will continue to receive daily that basket of cream, eggs, and butter, and she will feign a belief in the difficulty of finding a market for such commodities, which the Colonel's delicacy prompts him to

hint vaguely. He seems to have a new interest in life, since he can be of use to these desolate girls. Captain Ellice, who is his co-trustee, was prevented by severe illness in Scotland from coming down to the funeral. He is a kind-hearted man, and would do all he could for the children of his old chum; but not wise, though he has lived so much in the world. It is well, therefore, that he is content to leave everything in the hands of his colleague.

I called on Mrs. Morley yesterday, and told her all that had happened. She seemed much relieved to hear of the Count's departure. His presence here has hung like a black cloud over her, ready to burst at any moment, since that Sunday; and she has never ventured, of course, to church.

I saw Philip Stapylton to-day. He tells me that Jack felt the Admiral's death very much; but has only seen Linda once since, his father having positively forbidden him to go to Sunny Cove, and he cannot bear to exasperate the Squire, who is in very indifferent health.

"Jack has a good heart, Esdaile," said Philip; "and if he only has the strength to stick to

the girl he *really* loves through thick and thin, all may still turn out well."

Aye, if he have the strength!

November 4th.—Yesterday, as I was crossing the Common I saw a dark figure in the distance, defined against the clear grey autumn sky, which I immediately recognised and hastened to overtake. It is by these chance meetings now that I indemnify myself for the rareness of my visits to Sunny Cove. Easy enough to give plausible reasons for going there: cheat others, perhaps myself, into the belief that it is my "pastoral duty." I dare not tamper with the danger. Only, through the Colonel, I manage to have daily tidings of her well-being; but when accident brings us together, then I hold myself free to enjoy the delight of her loved presence. She is always kind and friendly: has a certain grateful regard for my small services, and what I suppose must be called a respect for me. Would, alas! that her manner were *more* distant and reserved than it is. There might then be some chance for me. I ask myself over and over again what there is in this woman that draws me

towards her beyond any I have ever seen or dreamed of? She has so few of the faults or follies men love in women : and she is *apparently* the only thing we never pardon—cold. But is not the heart of an undemonstrative woman by far the deepest and the strongest? Because it gives no sign of passionate life, is that a reason why its pulses are frozen for ever?

I overtook her and we shook hands. I asked how Vanda was?

“Much better, only a little cough left. Mrs. Stapylton, hearing she had been ill, wrote and asked her to go with them to Brighton for change of air. The Squire is ill, you know. It was kindly meant, no doubt, but of course Vanda didn’t accept.”

“Why, of course? I should have thought it the best thing for her in every way,—change of scene to divert her thoughts a little.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Ellice, with an expression of face that I have rarely seen, that reminded me of her youngest sister, “but I should be the last person to advise Vanda to accept the hospitality of anyone who has behaved as Mrs. Stapylton has done to us. I dare say

there is every excuse to be made for her. No doubt Jack's marrying Linda would be very imprudent, and a mother, naturally, I dare say, uses all her influence to prevent it: still I cannot but feel that my sister has been very hardly used."

"And so you are decidedly against 'imprudent marriages,' as they are called, Miss Montacute?" I asked with some curiosity, after a pause. The answer was not satisfactory.

"It entirely depends on the tastes and habits of life. All general rules are absurd. No one knows what *poverty* is till they have tried it."

I was silent, and in a minute or two she continued,

"Vanda, poor child, can ill stand it. All the little details of close economy irritate and worry her to the last degree. Indeed, her health is of far less moment, I think, than the state of her mind. A sullen despondency has taken hold of her. She sits, her eyes fixed on the fire, and cannot or *will* not employ herself in any way. Linda and I am obliged to lead a very different life, as you may believe.

God knows we feel the loss of our dear father deeply, but the hard actual present, Mr. Esdaile, does not admit of vain repinings for the past. Life is made up of to-days. I wish my sister could be brought to see this: but it is difficult. I have even suggested to her the possibility of our all having to do something to gain a livelihood by-and-bye—we hardly know how far our reduced income will carry us yet; but it only makes her angry, and these discussions do harm, I'm afraid, instead of good."

That there should be discussions at all between them, at such a time, is sad. If their common grief has not produced unity, how will this wayward girl and her sisters live together in any peace or comfort hereafter?

We had reached that portion of the Common where the Stapylton woods adjoin it, with their fringing of gorse and brushwood. The broad sandy high road crosses the property here, and into this we now emerged, just as the baying of the hounds and a horn among the woods told us that the hunt was not far distant. Ellice hastened her pace along the road towards Ashford, naturally unwilling to meet a number of

acquaintances; but the horn and the yelping grew nearer and nearer, and now we could distinguish the scarlet coats, the white and liver-coloured hounds sparkling among the bare boughs and withered ferns. What sight prettier, were we in the mood to stay and watch them? But we only think of getting away; of not being overtaken and surrounded by a knot of merry sportsmen, when, unfortunately, it seems one *has* already spied us, and is cantering across through briar and brake, to intercept us, while his companions ride more leisurely down the cover-side. It is Jack, taking the road-side ditch in gallant style, and riding up, his face all a-glow. Clearly he is neither thinner, nor paler, for his crossings in love, and can ride to hounds as well as ever.

“Caught sight of you and Esdaile, and just come over, Ellice, to tell you we are off to Brighton to-morrow. Governor very seedy. Wrote to Lin last night: did she get my letter? Tell her that I shall be running up here again before long, to look after the farm, of course; and don't you let her be down in the mouth, Ellice. I say, fancy, it's the first time Mrs. S.

has been away from home for God knows how many years; never was on a rail in her life: but of course she couldn't let the Governor go without her now; and, by Jove! she was very near making him post the whole way, only Phil prudently observed it would cost as much as his half-year's allowance. How's Van? Been in any of her tantrums lately? Mrs. S. is sorry she won't go with her; looked on it as an *amende honorable*, and knew there was no chance of my flirting with Van. Mrs. S. declares, too, she's "a very discreet young woman." What do you say to that, Ellice? Anything 'll go down with her but Lin, in fact. Well, never mind! when things are at their worst, they must mend, I suppose; so, in the words of the poet, I never let my pecker go down. Something 'll turn up, perhaps—eh? So good-bye, Ellice. God bless you; and give Lin lots of love. Good-bye, Esdaile."

And away he trotted down the road, waving his hand: as light, careless, but good-hearted a fellow as ever breathed.

The conversation on our way home was desultory enough. Ellice was pre-occupied. I

do not think the interview with Jack had done much to cheer her; but she did not allude to him, or to what he had said. At last the pleasure of walking silently by her side even, came to an end. At the gate of Sunny Cove, I bade her good-bye, and turned home.

* * * * *

I have just heard what has given me more pleasure than any piece of news for many a day. John Hurst tells me that he expects his wife to be confined in a couple of months. If it please God that the child live, this will be the greatest consolation to them both for the loss of that other little one. John seems to me a changed man; his energies roused, his good and tender feelings awakened, ever since that dastardly assault on his wife. Another cause for his anxiety at the time now becomes apparent: it never occurred to me then.

“I ha’n’t no fears for her, Parson; she’s a brave lass is my Nelly, and got well over that fright she got, nigh upon two months ago—*you* remember, sir. Well, there’s the crib a-waiting all ready for him now, as soon as he likes to come. Somehow, I be less down

when I looks at it now, Parson," and the honest fellow's face bore testimony to his words.

November 30th.—

Εἶδετε παρ' ἄκρας ὡς ἀπεθρίσεν τρίχας,
σώζουσα κάλλος. . . .

Helen crops only the *tips* of her hair as a grief-offering on Clytemnestra's tomb, which the lynx-eyed Electra (and every other woman) perceives. Miss Tarragon stopped me in the street yesterday to call my attention to Vanda Montacute and her attire, as she crossed the way just opposite. Brilliant, beautiful, and clearly not neglectful of her appearance, in spite of her recent sorrow. Amplitude of crinoline, hair carefully crimped with net of black beads, surmounted by black Spanish hat, and her cheek of a brighter carnation flush than before her illness. She has still a short hard cough, which makes me regret seeing her out so late this damp day: but she resented my saying so, and her manner is more strange, I think, than ever. Unnaturally defiant and repulsive in one so young and who has recently known so much suffering, though every now

and then I fancy there is an internal struggle going on, and that, on some false principle, poor girl, she nerves herself to beat down and trample under foot every softening influence. I would not be repelled to-day, but walked alongside of her, as though I did not perceive her evident desire to be alone. I tried to draw her into something more than casual street-conversation; to touch the secret spring that might awaken into life some slumbering impulses for good; her life being still, as I learn, a waste of passionate regrets, followed by long fits of obstinate and sullen listlessness. My efforts were vain; she only responded very curtly. The talking was all on one side. She was going to the post-office: I said I also would pass round that way and see if the second post had brought me anything. By so doing one gets one's letters nearly an hour sooner than by waiting for the tardy delivery of the Postman. Except in cases of emergency, however, or should chance lead one near the office at this hour, the custom of Ashford is patiently to abide its time. That Vanda should be at the trouble of walking three-quarters of a mile

to receive her letters personally, struck me as singular; and why should she be accompanied by neither of her sisters?

When we reached the Office (by which time Vanda was extremely irritable and had snubbed me repeatedly) the woman looked out from an inner shop, and seeing us, without asking further questions, handed a letter to Vanda. My eyes, which are very quick, caught a glimpse of the superscription as the latter received and hurried it into her pocket, and I *thought*—but I cannot feel sure—that it resembled a small cramped handwriting I had seen before. As I had no longer an excuse for inflicting my society upon the young lady, so obviously against her wish, we parted at the door of the Post-office, and I walked home.

To-day, as I met Ellice at the school, I had an opportunity of settling my doubts upon one point, and of determining what my line of conduct should be thereupon.

“Excuse me, Miss Montacute,” I said, “if I ask what seems an impertinent question. The confidence you have more than once reposed in me—and of which, I trust, you will

never find me unworthy—prompts me to do so. Did you receive any letters by yesterday afternoon's post? and how did they come?"

She stared, but answered at once,

"I had two letters,—brought by the Postman: one from Captain Ellice, and one——"

"Pardon me. I was only anxious to know whether you had received *any* letters—and through the ordinary channel. My reason is this. Your sister Vanda, I am afraid, has engaged herself in some foolish correspondence, which she is afraid you may discover. She gives directions at the Post-office, I have now no doubt, that letters directed to *her* are to be left till called for—not sent up with yours to Sunny Cove. It is well you should know this. Your own good sense will direct you how best to proceed in this difficult matter. With your sister's character, any violent opposition must be dangerous, I know."

"Most dangerous," said Ellice, her cheek flushing, "but there are principles of right and wrong that must not be tampered with. If this thing actually *be*—but no, I cannot believe it!"

Thereupon, seeing that her suspicions pointed in the same direction as my own, I felt bound to tell her that sad dismal story, which since Bismark's departure I have been hoping might remain unsaid. It has now become an imperative duty—if there be so much as a chance of Vanda's intercourse with that bad man being still unbroken—that she herself and all those dear to her should be enlightened as to his character and history. I told Ellice, therefore, as briefly as I could, but plainly, omitting all names, the story of *that* life,—one of the many, probably, that have been blighted by him. I felt like a surgeon performing a cruel operation. She winced under it, dear girl: the bare thought of such things connected with her sister; and then the scenes with that sister which she knew must follow, the passionate tears, the bitterness and indignation—and *he* only in his grave two short months!

“God give me strength to guide her!” she murmured.

Christmas Eve.—When I returned home late this afternoon, I found a message, telling me that Mrs. Hurst was confined—a full month

before it was expected. They wished the child to be baptized immediately, as Julep feared it would not live. This was sad news. I hastened to the cottage, and found John nursing the tiniest brown baby I ever beheld, examining it with great curiosity, and asking Julep every five minutes how he thought it was getting on? Better than he at first expected,—every prospect now of its living, opines that great authority. Nevertheless, as the Parson is here, just to ease Nelly's mind, it may as well be baptized, says John; and the ceremony is performed. Nelly, meanwhile, white and still under the shadow of the bed-curtain, is just able to move her grey eyes heavily towards me, and thank me with a smile as they lay her baby on her breast. Christmas Eve has brought its good tidings to her. I knelt down and said a prayer for that little household, to which one has now been added; and I prayed, above all, that John might be able to sing in his heart, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

A pale watery moon was rising behind the cottage as I stepped out into the mild evening

air. But before I reached home a little incident occurred suggestive of different thoughts to those pure and peaceful ones belonging to the scene I had just quitted. The sound of the village waits came up merrily as I walked down the hill; and, tempted by the warmth of the evening (and perhaps by something which need not here be chronicled), I turned out of my direct road into the lane, at the entrance of which the windows of Sunny Cove gleamed out into the darkness. Now this lane leads round the village and debouches at the further end, where stands the Priory. So, after looking up for some minutes at one of the windows in that little cottage, I strode on under the Priory wall, taking this circuit homewards.

Many thoughts crowded on my brain. Above all, a sadness to think that the harmony of this holy season should be marred by discords and strife in that household of sisters. Then arose also visions of a possible future, when one of them should be havened from the storm. The pale moon over the quickset hedge opposite rose higher and higher, the upper shoots and brambles now telling darkly against its silver

disk. And as I walked along, I became conscious of two figures in front of me, on whom I perceptibly gained, as they paced slowly under the shadow of the hedge. Finally they stopped altogether, perhaps at the sound of approaching footsteps, and in another minute I was alongside of them. The woman — for one was a woman, I could see that, in the shadow where they stood—then turned sharp round, and swiftly walked, almost ran, down the lane, still keeping under the hedge. She was muffled in a veil and long cloak: impossible to distinguish either face or figure.

One thing alone startled me: when she was some yards distant, I heard a short, dry, smothered cough.

The man had walked rapidly away in the opposite direction; and I had caught a momentary glimpse of his face, which did not seem wholly unfamiliar to me. A great deal of black hair, and an assumption of the brigand about his general appearance. Where was it I had seen him before? Certainly we have nothing answering this description in Ashford. I felt more than curious, anxious, to discover

who this man was, and I hurried my pace as much as possible without seeming actually to dog his steps. I kept him in sight until the corner of the lane; but when I turned into the village street, he was gone: no trace of him anywhere. I even acted on the impulse of the moment, and inquired at each of the inns what travellers are staying there, but with no satisfactory results.

And now that I am at home, and writing quietly by my fireside, it seems strange that I should have been excited by such an ordinary incident. A clandestine meeting in a lane is no rare occurrence. Nor are coughs in December very uncommon. Why did I not follow that figure when it turned back towards Sunny Cove? Without giving it chase, which would hardly have been justified by the circumstances, I could not have done so. Then as to flashy black-whiskered strangers, the Great Western is near enough to account for any number. No, I was clearly mistaken. When I come to think over it calmly, there is not a shadow of ground for supposing it to be Vanda. And even were it likely that Bismark should be in

the neighbourhood, this man in no way, either as to height or colouring, resembled him. The correspondence between Vanda and the Count we have every reason to hope has been stopped. Letters, on the Colonel's authority, intercepted, and returned unopened. Writing on the young lady's side peremptorily interdicted. Not until every other means had failed, was this extreme measure resorted to. Indeed, things have come to a deplorable pass between the sisters,—stormy scenes, passionate recrimination, and reproach, in which my poor Ellice has been severely tried, until the Colonel's authority at length interfered. He spoke to me on the subject yesterday, and we agreed that, in the present state of feeling, a temporary separation between the sisters would be well. The Colonel has a sister resident at Bath, to whom he has written, asking her to invite Vanda, on a visit of a couple of months. As this sister is a sensible and cheerful woman, perhaps the change may do Vanda good in all ways. We must hope so. In the meantime, the Colonel has been attacked with his old enemy—gout, and is confined to his bed, a little cross at being kept

prisoner just at this moment, when the affairs at Sunny Cove demand his personal attention and care. I must see him to-morrow. *If*, indeed, my vague suspicion of to-night were corroborated, then would this business begin to wear an alarming aspect. God forbid that it be so!

May this Christmas Eve, which brings its glad tidings to so many, herald in a year of peace to my beloved! May the rough places be made smooth, the sore wounds healed and forgotten!

Christmas Day.—I have seen Ellice for a moment. Vanda was not in church. E. says she looks very ill, and is in a state of feverish excitement and irritability: remains in her room the greater part of the day, and scarcely speaks to her sisters.

Called on the Colonel: very suffering, poor old gentleman, and quite unable to move from his bed. Has sent his servant to make every inquiry (with caution) relative to the stranger I saw last night. If he is in the village we shall hear more of him. The Colonel, however, agrees in thinking I must have been mistaken

as to Vanda. But he is uneasy about her, and is anxious now to get her to Bath as soon as possible.

27th December, Monday Night, Twelve o'clock.

—There is no train for another hour. Good God! how slowly the last three have gone! I cannot taste the supper my good Sally has set on the table; but while she is fastening my portmanteau I seize this book, and must try to arrange my thoughts—which will need method and composure—by noting briefly the events of this evening.

It was past eight o'clock when I was roused by a sharp hurried knock at the hall-door. I pushed away my chair and book from the fire, and was on the stairs as Sally opened the door, letting in a gust of wind and rain, and with it a woman's figure. Her cloak was dripping and so was the heavy veil which she threw back as she entered. The candle flared in her face—it was Ellice! I ran down, seized her hand, and implored her to tell me what was the matter. It was nearly a minute before she could speak. Her face was deadly pale and had a fixed expression: the tongue seemed

to cleave to the roof of her mouth. At last, in a low hoarse voice, she gasped out the single word,

“Gone!”

She clung hold of the banisters: then sank down on the lowest steps of the stair and buried her face in her hands. Sally had withdrawn: we were alone.

“For God’s sake, Ellice—Miss Montacute, speak,” I said; “it cannot be—you do not mean——”

“Yes, yes,” she moaned; “gone, gone for ever:” then suddenly starting up and looking imploringly into my face, she said hurriedly, “You are my only hope, Mr. Esdaile. Go after her: bring her back, ere it be too late . . . no—no—*whenever, however*, bring her back!—only bring her back, poor unhappy child! This is what I have come for.”

“I will go anywhere—all the world over for you. Only tell me what you know: when—how was it?”

“She went out walking at three and she never returned.”

“When did you discover she was gone?”

“Not till half-an-hour ago. Her door was locked—so it has generally been lately. We knocked several times: asked her to come to dinner; no answer, and at last we got alarmed, had the door burst open, and found these lines on the table.”

I seized the crumpled piece of paper from her trembling hand. It contained these words:—

“We could never live together in peace. Forget me. Henceforward, *I am dead for you in this world*. Believe this, and do not attempt to discover me. You will not succeed.

“VANDA.”

I looked into Ellice's face.

“Was I too hard with her, Mr. Esdaile?” she murmured.

“No. God knows that you were not, dear Miss Montacute. Poor wretched girl! But there is no time to be lost. Do you know anything more of her?”

“Nothing: but that she was met walking alone on the London road.”

“The up-train leaves at four. If she went by that, as I suppose, she is in town by this time. Have you seen Colonel Shaddock?”

"I came to you first, as he is ill in bed, and cannot move."

"I must go to him at once: that's the first thing. There is no telegraph, unfortunately, nearer than Dorminster. Too late: no use now. The next train is at one in the morning. We must make every possible enquiry in the meantime. I will be with you in one moment."

Presently we dashed up the street, against the driving rain, Ellice's arm in mine. The Colonel's servant didn't hesitate to let us in. No time for ceremony: I followed him at once into the Colonel's bed-room, without waiting to be announced; Ellice left below in the parlor. Our consultation was brief and decided. I told him the little we knew, and he agreed that there was but one course. As he was unable to stir, I should hasten to London in his place, armed with a magistrate's warrant, which he made out (Vanda being his ward and under age), and the detectives should instantly be communicated with. In the meantime he despatched his servant to the Police-station, desiring that they would set every inquiry on foot, and trace, if possible, the

direction the fugitive had taken. Promising to return for Ellice, I then set off for the Rectory as hard as I could. Found Mr. Brigstock at tea: Mrs. B. with the eldest child there. Drew the Rector aside and told him briefly the state of the case. He seemed—and I'm sure really was—heartily sorry, but when it came to the question of my going in pursuit of the unfortunate girl, his confirmed pomposity got the better of him and he began to hum and haw. As this was not a moment to mince matters, I then plainly said that I held the duty of trying to recover this poor wandering sheep—which owing to circumstances had devolved peculiarly on me, a clergyman and an intimate friend—this duty, I say, was to me so paramount that all others for the moment bowed before it. If I were not back in a few days, I undertook to promise that Brereton, who has so often offered to take my duty, would come down here. The Rector consented to this, and we parted amicably. There was yet another visit to be paid. It suddenly occurred to me that I might obtain some useful hint from Mrs. Morley, as to where I should

be likely to find that scoundrel Bismark (to whom my thoughts of course turned first), on arriving in London. I had a few minutes' interview with her. She deplored that her predictions had been too well verified: she gave me every assistance that she could,—one, above all, that I may find of inestimable value, perhaps: also his ordinary address—his club and general resorts. I then left her, and returned to Ellice. She was pacing up and down the room with agitated steps.

“Mr. Esdaile,” she said immediately I entered, “cannot I go with you? I feel as if some instinct would lead me to her, and that no one else will find her. You don't know, you can't tell the agony of my mind. It seems now as if our poor father were calling on me to answer for her, his darling, and that I have somehow abused his dying trust. I was too harsh, and I ought never to have left her. What were a few passionate words? I should have borne everything from her!”

And the agitation of the dear girl at last found vent in a passionate burst of tears. I was glad of this natural relief, and did not

attempt to stop her sobs. It was very unlike the calm, self-possessed Ellice Montacute I was accustomed to see and believe in ; but the horror of this event had broken down all the outworks of reserve : she wept on, regardless of me and of everything. Then gradually she listened, while I pointed out the impossibility of her accompanying me in my search, which might extend beyond London, abroad perhaps ; the impossibility, too, of leaving Linda alone with one little maid. They must patiently and together abide such intelligence as I can send them : twice a day, if possible. And, owing to the liberal kindness of the Colonel, I was able to add that no expense should be spared.

“The result is in other hands, Miss Montacute,” I added. “But be assured of one thing : with all my heart and strength will I follow up every clue that may lead to your unfortunate sister’s discovery. Do you trust me ?”

“I do ;” and thus we parted.

Up to the present moment, the facts ascertained are these. A man answering to the description of the stranger I saw the other evening, has lodged for the last three days at the small

public-house opposite the railway station, two miles from the village. He took his departure for London this afternoon: he travelled second class. By the same train, Vanda, it appears, also took a ticket for London, first class. No communication was remarked between them, nor was any one observed to speak to Vanda. Some man who chanced to see the stranger at the public-house, said he recognised him as a servant who was up at the Castle, in the autumn. It all flashed on me in a moment: the Count's valet, whom I once or twice saw.

There being yet three hours before the next train, I had time to go over the business at greater length with the Colonel, and hear his advice as to the manner I should proceed on getting to town. I came home, threw some things into my portmanteau, and am now waiting for the fly.

London, 30th December. — Three harassing days here. Our efforts to discover the fugitive hitherto unavailing. I put myself into communication with the detectives immediately I arrived. Every probable clue to the wretched girl's present abode has failed. Bismark, to

whom of course I directed the detectives in the first instance, is *said* to be in Paris. At his apartments in Bury Street, they stated that letters sent there were forwarded to the General Post Office, Paris. They knew nothing further of him. He retains his apartments; didn't expect him back for some time; saw him last about three weeks ago. He has been seen at none of his old haunts. The Jockey Club knows nothing of him. His friends believe him to be abroad.

One of the railway guards thinks he remembers that a young lady in mourning came up by the evening train on Monday, and was met by a tall gentleman, who drove off with her in a private brougham. Upon being asked how he remembered her, among a crowd of passengers, he replied that it was from her having no luggage, when he offered to be of any assistance to her.

The Foreign Office, and the Austrian Embassy have been applied to. Nothing is known of the Count. No passport to include any woman has been made out in his name; nor does it appear that any of those issued under

other names lately, would answer to the description of the Count and Vanda.

From this I am led to believe that she is still in England—probably in London; and I shall remain here until I have some certain indication of her having left it.

January 6th, 1859, Thursday.—Another week without material result, alas! The few facts that have come to light only confirming my suspicion that the unhappy Vanda is still in London or its neighbourhood. Bismark has been seen. One of the Ring, who has had money transactions with the Count, and knows his face well, states to have seen him in a Hansom cab on Tuesday last, towards dusk, in the neighbourhood of Brompton. Through the Colonel's liberality, who writes, urging me on to spare no expense, I have offered a considerable sum to this informant, if he can obtain a clue to the Count's present residence.

To-day I went again, for the third time, to Bury Street. The woman was inclined to be impertinent. She said she had already told me everything she knew: had nothing to add, and couldn't have her time taken up in this way.

I slipped some money into her hand.

“Will you allow me to see the Count’s rooms? I shall not be two minutes;” and the woman surlily led the way upstairs, and threw open a door on the first floor.

A small three-windowed sitting-room, hung round with sporting prints. There was a stand of riding-whips, and some handsomely-mounted pipes, a liqueur case, cigars, French novels, and a chimney piece covered with cards and the fragments of notes and letters; also a small deal case in the corner of the room. My eye ran over these details: only the two last seemed worth particular attention. I examined the box: it was open and empty; but the printed words on the card of address, “From Mrs. Smith,” indicated that it had contained woman’s wearing apparel of some kind. I turned to the mantel-piece, and glanced over the covers and shreds of writing with which it was strewn. One such morsel had fallen into the grate: I picked it up,—only a corner; but it bore the Ashford post mark of the 24th, three days before Vanda’s flight. Nothing more to be learnt here, so I left the house.

Poor Ellice! I send her the barren results of each day, with a heavy heart. Brereton has taken my duty, so I am easy on that score.

January 7th.—This evening one of the detectives called. I had not seen him for two days.

“Begin to have very little hope of finding the parties here, sir,” he said. “Haven’t got so much as an end of the thread, you see, sir; that’s where it is. Trust me to unravel it, if I had. Don’t see what’s to be done here, unless something turns up.”

“Have you seen that fellow Raikes again?”

“Just come from him. Nothing satisfactory. Quibbles, and turns round now, about being mistaken, perhaps, in the party he saw. There’s no dependence, anyhow, on these fellows: lies comes so natural to ’em.”

“Well, what do you advise now? Have you nothing to propose?”

“As expense is no object, sir, I should recommend your sending me or another gentleman over to Bullin, and on to Paris, if so be as any one answering to the description of the parties can be heard of there. We’ve written;

but these French fellows pay no attention to our letters : it wants a 'cute man on the spot."

"Well," said I reluctantly, "go then ; but I am still firmly persuaded they are in London or its neighbourhood. Any more answers to the advertisement in the *Times* ?"

"Four more 'young ladies in deep mourning,' found by parties claiming the reward. No go, sir."

I see no more glimmer of light than does the detective. Still I adhere obstinately to the belief that Bismark is in London. Leave it without some definite knowledge, I am resolved not. I have instituted inquiries at all the servants' clubs, but cannot hear that the Count's valet is known to be in London. Wrote to Ellice.

January 11th, Tuesday. — No news from Boulogne or Paris. I am beginning, in despair, to think of my return. I wander up and down the streets, and at night, when they are thronged with haggard painted faces, the gas sometimes flashes upon a profile that reminds me of the unhappy girl. I stop, turn round, and assure myself I am mistaken ; and then the miserable

thought occurs of what she may some day come to! So I go on from day to day, catching at some straw of hope now and then,—nothing solid or enduring. Rewards doubled—all to no purpose. I dread my daily letters to poor E. more and more.

January 15th, Saturday Night.—God be praised! I sit down at the close of this eventful week, during which I have not had a moment to write, with a sore heart, a throbbing brain, and yet feeling deeply thankful!

Let me put my thoughts in order: they need it. I shall have to give Ellice a more detailed account of these sad events than I have been able to do in a hurried letter; it is well to set them down here in order.

On Wednesday evening towards dusk, I was turning the corner of a street leading from Grosvenor Square, when a cab, furiously driven, met me. As it heaved perilously round the curb-stone, the street lamp, just lit, fell upon the face of a person inside,—hideous bloated face, that I almost instantly remembered! The cab was already half way down the street. My excitement was tremendous,—a breathless

frightful feeling that here was the object of all my anxieties close at hand, and that she would escape me ! I tore along, nearly knocking down two men in my way, keeping that dim object in sight, through the fog, now lost for a moment as it turned down to the right, now blocked up by intervening carriages. Once I thought I had lost it ; but as I reached the opening of a narrow street, there it was again ; and this time it pulled up at the door of a good-sized house. I slackened my pace, and fell to the opposite side of the way. The street was silent, — no other carriage or pedestrian. A short man jumped from the cab, and, without dismissing it, ran up the steps and hurriedly rang the bell. Could she be here ? Was this the lurking-place we had all hunted for in vain ? I could hardly think it. There was a brass plate on the door, the name of it undistinguishable from where I stood. About the man, however, there could be no doubt. There was the seam still on his cheek that I planted there the last time we met ; and the ruffianly English groom was not to be mistaken under his plain clothes. As the door opened, and he

turned to speak to the servant, I crept under the shadow of the cab, the better to observe what passed. He stood in the hall, and spoke for some minutes, asking several questions, as it seemed to me, but all in so low a tone that I could catch nothing. At last, just as he was leaving the door, the words, "as soon as he returns," fell upon my ear. He jumped into the cab, with the sole direction, "Back again!" to the driver, and away they rattled, but more leisurely than they came. I had to decide on one of two courses instantly: either call at this house and endeavour to bribe the servant to tell me what he knew, or follow this ruffian wherever he might go. I did not hesitate. The servant might very possibly know nothing; at all events, this course would *keep*, and might be pursued as well to-morrow, in case of the other failing. So I clung on to the back-board of the cab until I should find another, resolved, at all hazards, not to lose sight of this one, though it should go on half the night. Suddenly we pulled up in Oxford Street: it was at a gin-palace, where the refined inmate of the cab, calling out to the driver to stop, went

in to regale himself for a few minutes. I took the opportunity to retire some yards, and hail a Hansom. My instructions were to follow at a certain distance, never losing sight of the cab, and halting immediately that vehicle stopped.

The man got in, and off again; down Park Lane, past Knightsbridge, and turning in the direction of Brompton. After intersecting innumerable new squares, streets, and crescents, we came to a peculiarly desolate region, where I thought it prudent to desire my driver to slacken his pace yet further, to avoid arousing suspicion. At a small, modest little villa, the cab at last stopped. It was one of a row of detached buildings, having small gardens in front, with some acres of building land beyond. The cab deposited its occupant, who entered the house, while I, dismissing my Hansom at the corner of the road, walked up and down for a few minutes, revolving in my mind what my next step should be, now that I had—as I believed—tracked Bismark to his hiding-place. A light burnt in an upper window. In that room, Vanda Montacute probably was at this moment. The object of my daily thought and nightly

prayer close at hand. As I looked up, the light was obscured for a moment by some dark object, and the shadow of a man fell upon the blind.

Committing the success of my undertaking into His hands who alone could make it prosper, I approached the door and pulled the bell. A hurried step scuffled down the passage a moment after, and, to my surprise, the door was opened wide without question or difficulty. I entered boldly, passing the woman, who said, as she shut the door,

“The doctor, I s’pose, sir? ’ardly expected you so soon.”

“Tell the—gentleman, if you please,” said I, avoiding the woman’s question, and I walked into the drawing-room, the door of which stood open. A fire burnt brightly in the grate, but there was neither lamp nor candle. The woman ran upstairs and knocked at a door.

“If you please, sir, the doctor’s come.”

I hear the door open; a man’s firm step comes down stairs.

Bismark enters the room; we stand opposite to each other in the flickering firelight!

He starts back ! His face, which is pale, contracts, and becomes a shade paler.

I remarked even in those few seconds that he was much altered ; a worn, haggard, anxious look, that aged him in appearance by many years. After a pause, during which I purposely abstained from speaking, he recovered something of his habitual *sang froid*, and said in a dry polite tone,

“To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit, Mr. Esdaile ? It is an unexpected——”

“Count,” I interrupted sternly, “we will dispense with forms of courtesy, if you please. *Why* I come here, you need not to be told, neither does it signify *how* chance has led me to the discovery of your hiding-place. Suffice it that I am here to appeal to your conscience. I charge you with having committed a most foul and cruel wrong. You have brought the heaviest misery and disgrace upon an honest family. Your unhappy victim is now overhead, and, if I am not mistaken, lying ill. Before God, Count Bismark, how will you answer to this charge ?”

He bit his lip for a moment.

“Your words are violent, Mr. Esdaile; but I forgive you. It is natural you should look at this with the clergyman’s views. If you were acquainted with all the circumstances, and knew how unhappy the dear girl was, and how she——”

“I don’t want to hear anything about it, Count Bismark. If you can palliate the first great wrong to your *conscience* in any way, you are happy! But, sir, are you ready to repair that wrong by the only means in your power? What specious argument can you find to excuse your marrying the girl you have ruined?”

“I shall be bold to ask, Mr. Esdaile, by what authority you come here and interfere with matters that do not concern you?” asked the Count, with a slight flush, and losing his calmness of manner. “The young lady is here, under my protection, of her own will and desire. You are not relation, or——”

“You ascertained, no doubt, that she *has* no near relations,” I said with some warmth. “It is by the authority of my cloth, Count Bismark, in the first place, that I speak to you. My

duty is to try and bring all who sin as you are doing to a sense of their wickedness. Secondly, as the friend, the only available one, of this girl's sisters. Thirdly, I come here armed with the authority of the law."

I produced the warrant from my pocket:—"Miss Vanda Montacute, being only nineteen years of age, can be claimed as 'an infant' by her guardians. Colonel Shaddock, one of these has empowered me to act for him."

The *rusé* man of the world was staggered: he passed his hand across his brow, and said, with the only touch of real feeling he had yet shown,

"So! . . . but you could not act on it, Mr. Esdaile, no, even did I not oppose it to the last drop of my blood. She is very ill, poor darling child! much too ill to be moved, or we should be abroad long since."

"What is the nature of her illness?"

He pointed to his chest.

"She burst a blood-vessel immediately she came to London. I hoped she was getting better; but to-day again——"

There was a violent ringing upstairs. Bismark looked anxious.

“That is her bell: I must go to her. Since you are here, Mr. Esdaile, remain. Wait for me, and I will see you again when I can. She will not bear me away for long.”

He left the room, and I heard his long stride up the stairs, three steps at a time.

Five—ten minutes of anxious suspense. What was next to be done? Things looked as hopeless as they well could: small chance apparently of making any impression on Bismark. Oh! that I had the wisdom of the serpent! That I knew how to move him! Was she really so ill? I must see her at all events, and then—

The door opened, and Bismark, with the marks of recent agitation on his face, entered and approached the table where I stood.

“She wishes to see you, Mr. Esdaile. She knows you are here, and desires you shall hear from her very lips that she will not quit me; never, till death shall separate us!”

“And can *you* truthfully say as much, Count Bismark? Is it the faithful wish and intention of your heart to remain loyal to this girl through life? Or is it the same passion you have felt for a dozen other women whom you have de-

ceived and forgotten? If your love be something stronger than these, why hesitate to hallow it by the only tie that can be lasting? I do not speak now of religion: we put aside that for the moment. Man's laws upon you, and those like you, have more influence than God's. By those laws it is ordained that a man's mistress shall be an outcast, a scorn, and a reproach. Will you, in your intense and miserable selfishness, let this poor child be such? Will you wither up all her future life, and let the canker of remorse eat into her heart, till death releases her from her burthen of shame? I do not envy your feelings, as you stand beside the grave you dare not inscribe with the name of her who was neither wife nor maid! If your love is worthy the name—nay, if you have one spark of honourable feeling, you will repair this foul wrong by marrying Vanda Montacute."

His head was buried in his hands, but I saw that he was violently agitated. Something that sounded like a curse broke from his lips.

"I cannot yet, Mr. Esdaile—cannot . . . by and by perhaps I love her, *mein Gott im Himmel*, better than I ever loved a woman in

my life ; but I cannot : it is no use ; there is a barrier at present which”

A horrible suspicion crossed my mind. “ You do not mean that you *are married* ? ”

“ No, Mr. Esdaile. But there is one,” his voice trembled, “ whose misery I have been the cause of, and who is now separated from her husband. I solemnly engaged myself not to marry, in the case her husband should choose to divorce her. He has never seen her since, and may yet do so, I believe—though some months have gone by . . . Mon Dieu ! I must marry this woman though I love her no longer ! I never did love her as I do my Vanda—never ;—and now”

“ From this engagement, as you consider it such, she entirely and heartily frees you. She would not marry you if she were a widow to-morrow.”

Stooping towards him, I whispered a name which even the walls might not hear, and laid a letter before him. He started.

“ Have you then seen her ? ”

“ I have. And her last words were, ‘ Give him back that note that he wrote me six months

ago. Tell him that, while I blame myself far more than him, I hope never to see his face again in this world, and that *nothing should ever induce me to marry him.*' She added, 'Say that I charge him, moreover, by all the misery, past, present, and future, he has caused me, to do justice to his last unhappy victim.'"

Even at that moment, I believe the man's vanity was wounded to think of the woman he had once loved discarding him on these terms. His head remained buried in his hands; and, misinterpreting his silence, I continued, after a moment's pause,

"It is not possible, Count Bismark, that you have so doubly perjured yourself as to swear fidelity to Vanda while your heart is *still* another's?"

He raised his head suddenly, and seized my hand. "No, no; whatever I may once have thought, I know that I love better Vanda,—in fine, I have never loved any one half as well. For marriage, why, see you, I think as long as a man and woman really love,—with the soul, I mean,—they *are* married. If *one* is unfaithful, then there is no more a real union, whether

they have been to church or not. I do not attach the importance you clergymen do to the ceremony."

"I will not discuss these views with you now, Count Bismark: they cannot at all events affect your conduct on this occasion. What you consider bound in God's eyes, you cannot refuse to let the Church unite, and the world sanction?"

"No. Now that I am no longer bound in honor to another, Mr. Esdaile, I will marry her, because I believe it will give the poor child pleasure, and because of these false views the world has. But it makes no difference to me. I am her husband *now*, Esdaile, for we have sworn faith. Were I married to that other, I should not be her real husband, see you."

Leaving the Count to entertain his German ideas of soul-marriage without discussion for the present, and relieved at the unexpected success that had attended my interview, I silently followed him upstairs.

"I can trust you," he said, pausing on the first landing, "not to agitate her by your reproach—or religious talk, eh? *Elle est très faible.*"

She was in bed, leaning on her arm, and looking intently towards the door, as we entered. I was shocked by the change in her. Two dark blue circles surrounded those lustrous eyes, which were deep sunk in her head, but unnaturally distended and brilliant. The face was wasted to half its size; the spot of color on either cheek marked a hollow instead of a rounded form. A long strip of black hair, escaping from its net, made the marble pallor of the throat more striking. Her thin fingers were twisted nervously through a pearl bracelet that lay upon the bed, and they never quitted hold of it while I was with her.

“What do you come here for? What do you want, Mr. Esdaile?” she exclaimed vehemently, but in a low hoarse voice that was terrible to listen to. “Why have you found me out? If it is to try to get me to leave him, I won’t. I told them I was dead. So I am: dead to them all. Dead! *Dead!* go and tell them so. I love him and will remain with him. I don’t care what they all say,—the world—your Ashford world that I hate so—yes, always hated. Now they have something to talk about! Well, tell them

I will never, *never* leave him, till he drives me away!"

I seated myself by her bedside.

"I am not going to urge you to leave him, my dear Miss Vanda. I urge you both, on the contrary, to remain true to each other through life."

She stared at me in astonishment, her hands clasped together on her bosom. "Only," I continued, "let your union be blameless in the sight of God and man."

Her breathing came short and thick. She looked wildly at Bismark, and again at me.

"*What does he mean, Karl?*"

"Calm yourself, *Liebchen*. This excitement is bad for you. He means that the impediment to our marriage is removed."

But even as he spoke a violent fit of coughing seized her. She sank back on her pillow and pressed her handkerchief to her lips; when she withdrew it, it was dyed crimson.

The Count rang violently for her maid; and then poured out something from a bottle on the table, which he tried to persuade Vanda to take. She shook her head; and as soon as the maid

appeared, I beckoned the Count out of the room, and told him I thought it necessary Vanda should not be excited any more that night: that I would return as early as I could the following day with a special licence, and advised him to keep her as quiet as possible in the meantime.

It was not till late in the afternoon next day that I succeeded in getting the licence, and found myself again at Bismark's door. Before it stood a dark plain brougham; and when I entered and was about to ascend the stairs, I met a middle-aged man coming nimbly down, whom I rightly guessed to be the doctor.

"Excuse me, sir, one word. What is your opinion of the case upstairs?"

"A clergyman, I presume, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then I ought not to conceal from you that I have been called in too late. They sent for me last evening. I was out of town. I should have seen her weeks ago. Even then I doubt whether human aid would have availed anything. But the person who has attended this case seems grossly to have misunderstood it. It is one of

very rapid decline; but the seeds have always been there."

"Good heavens! do you mean that you consider the case as absolutely hopeless?"

"I can do nothing, sir. I have endeavoured to prepare the Count; and have told him it is useless my coming again—I could do no good. I do not think he believed me—evidently does not expect a speedy termination. By being kept very quiet she may indeed linger a short time,—but—in short, sir, it is your duty to inform the lady of her real state. I repeat that I can do nothing. Good morning. Excuse me, sir. I am late for an appointment," and the doctor hurried into his brougham.

I had thought her very ill the previous day, but the idea that she was dying had not entered my mind. I had looked forward to her being taken to a warm climate and slowly recovering, and now!... I stood there on the landing, with the sad thought present, above all others, of her being summoned at such a moment, without receiving from their own lips the forgiveness of those who loved and mourned for her so deeply!

The maid came down to say the Count desired I would go upstairs.

He was sitting by the bed as I entered, holding her wasted hand in his, and shading his eyes with the other. I saw a marked change for the worse in her appearance since the previous day; but, though even more excited, the expression of her face was less fierce and indomitable. She seemed painfully weak: it was with the greatest difficulty I caught a word she said; but her eyes were never for an instant still, and her fingers still twitched at the pearl bracelet on the bed.

Bismark raised his head, and held out his hand to me.

“Do at once what you come for, my friend: you shall speak with her afterwards.”

I drew out the licence and showed him; then, opening the Book of Common Prayer, I bade him kneel down. He did so. And there, while the twilight closed more and more around, I read the solemn Marriage Service over them in that little chamber. His responses were firm and distinct. God alone knows the secret heart; but I believe he felt them. When he had to

place the ring on her finger, he drew a turquoise from his own. It was much too large for her: to prevent its slipping off, she nervously held it with the other hand, while a smile played over her feverish lips.

At the end of the service, when I offered up a prayer to Him who is merciful to all who truly repent, she suddenly started up, her eyes flashing with something of their old fire.

"No, no!" she cried, with her weak voice torn with passion; "I do *not* repent,—it is false! I would do it again to-morrow for *his* sake," and she clung to Bismark with quivering hands.

It was the last struggle of the demon to regain possession of a soul.

"God pity me!"

She burst into tears and fell back exhausted upon the pillow. Those tears, the first, fell like rain upon parched ground. They had a holy, softening influence upon the state of the dying girl. After that she lay comparatively calm, while I talked to her, and she joined me feebly in a prayer. Her eyes were fixed upon the wall where the moon was beginning

to stream through from the window in a narrow shaft of light; her hand lay tightly locked in Bismark's; and, when I had finished, after a few moments' silence, I perceived that she had dropped off into a fitful uneasy doze. She muttered, indeed, a broken sentence from time to time, but her eyes were now closed, and her breathing heavier and more equal. There we two men sat by the bed, watching and listening, and occasionally looking up into each other's faces, while the shaft of moonlight grew broader and broader in the room. Her hand, even in her sleep, felt for the ring on her finger, and moved restlessly over the pearl bracelet.

"He gave it me—his first gift," we heard her murmur. "There is no harm in it now, father; I am Countess Bismark—*Countess Bismark*. Let them laugh! Come, Ellice, forgive me—I could not help it—I had no one to love me, when our father went. You, both of you—and then I loved him *so much*." . . .

Then the voice became weaker, the words at last inaudible, and we only heard the sleeper's heavy irregular breathing. At last, towards nine

o'clock, I suppose, as the distant roar of the City was gradually subsiding, as the roll of each omnibus came separately and far between, and an occasional cab over the fresh gravel of that new district was the only near sound, the ballad of a street singer in the neighbouring square caught my ear. Probably a professional sailor, so common in the streets of London, for I recognized one of Dibden's sea-songs as the singer came nearer.

Vanda started up and listened, fixing her eyes upon the moonlit wall. Her breathing became more and more difficult, but she struggled to speak.

"He knows I am coming—it is his old song—and he welcomes me home with it. Father! dear father! . . . He waved me off before, and I shut my eyes—and tried—not—to see him. Now—now—he is—oh! so glad—so glad! He opens his arms wide, and stands upon the shore—to greet me. Father, I have made the port!—the sea is calm and sunny now—before I was so tossed—such a weary—weary voyage!—but—Karl—is—now—*my husband!*"

She turned, and flung herself passionately into

his arms; and in that last effort, the poor struggling spirit was released from all its suffering.

She was dead.

* * * * *

I remained with Bismark all night. No one who has not beheld mourning under such circumstances — the mourning without *hope*, the mourning that can see no further than the dark confines of the grave, knows what it is. I am glad, at least, that he does not reject my presence. Perhaps some chance word may grow up by-and-bye and bear seed, in spite of the thorns and tares. I have promised to remain here until after the funeral on Monday.

Ashford, January 19th.—Returned home last night, after the funeral and my last interview with Bismark.

To-day I have had the most painful duty of all to go through,—seeing the poor girls for the first time, and giving them every minute particular of their sister's last moments.

They are both terribly changed. Linda's appearance actually alarmed me: her face shrunk to half its size, and such a wan despairing look

in it, that one need only to see her to feel that the blow has struck to her very heart's core. There they sat, in the little darkened room, their white faces leaning forwards from the close black dresses, eagerly looking towards me, their hands clasped in each other. I observed that Ellice watched her sister, and when the latter rose and left the room, Ellice's eyes followed her anxiously.

"Your sister looks ill, I am sorry to see."

"It is not only this heavy trial, Mr. Esdaile, but its consequences. All chance of her marriage now is at an end."

"If Jack," I exclaimed indignantly, "is deterred by such a base consideration, he is utterly unworthy of her, and the sooner she forgets him the better."

"Perhaps not he himself, but his father and mother will make this—this disgrace," she murmured, lowering her eyes, "an additional plea for breaking it all off entirely, more particularly as you know they have other views for him."

"Has she not seen him since——?"

"He only returned from Brighton yesterday,

and rode over at once; but I advised Linda not to see him: it would agitate her to no purpose. She knows that Jack's character is not strong enough to resist the pressure from without, and she accepts her fate, poor child! though not without a struggle. She will write to him to-morrow, releasing him from his engagement, and then I hope her mind will be more tranquil, when the final wrench is made."

I was sorry, in my long interview with the Colonel, to find that he was much of the same opinion as Ellice. The old soldier alluded with a heightened colour, to the way in which some persons (Mrs. Stapylton among the number) had written or spoken on the subject of Vanda's sad fate. "It was no more than was to be expected." "Did we not always predict how those girls would turn out?" "Could it be otherwise with such a mother?" and other remarks of a similar nature, of which Miss Tarra-
gon was, of course, the loudest trumpeter in Ashford. Such being the case, Colonel Shaddock thought the more dignified course for Linda, was to let Jack be free.

"For no young woman of spirit, sir, would

enter into a family where she is regarded with contempt, and will have it thrown in her teeth that her husband only married her because he was bound in honour. If young men are what they were in my day, sir, Jack will stick to her all the more; but let his family distinctly understand that she frees him from his engagement,—eh, Mr. Esdaile?"

I do not know what I replied; my thoughts had suddenly taken another and deeper direction. This discussion had led me to reflect on Ellice's altered position, which had not struck me before. Can the world be so cruel as to visit their sister's sin on these poor girls? To turn coldly from them now that a heavier sorrow than death has fallen on them? I can scarcely believe it. Yet, if it be so, this will be my justification, and one for which I need never blush before God or man, for offering her my heart's devotion, and asking if she can consent to share a poor curate's lot through life. God knows whether she feels for me more than gratitude and regard. Sometimes I fancy—— But no, I will build up no delusions to-day, that may be shattered to-morrow.

I have fought against them so long, against them and my own heart, that I will take no rash step which may put a barrier between us for ever.

January 20th.—In the *Times* this afternoon I read the announcement:—"On the 13th inst., of rapid decline, Vanda, the wife of Count Karl Bismark." An act of reparation, unimportant in itself, but which I was glad Bismark had thought of doing. Those two lines of small print may soothe the gossip-mongers, perhaps! They need sully their lips no more by speaking of "that wretched creature." The facts indeed remain the same, but they belong to the story of the Countess Bismark. How these women do talk! It makes me bitter to see how much misery a careless word can produce,—not always unkindly meant,—the offspring of that vile rage for gossip that possesses nearly all societies. I was beset to-day on every side by enquiries concerning the poor girl. Miss Kate Halliday's especially irritated me. There was a tone of sublime exemption from all human passion,—a moral plumage that nothing could ruffle,—very distasteful to me. Even Tarragon, in spite of

her vehemence and wrathful diatribes, pleased me better. But why not let the unhappy subject of all this sleep at rest now? . . . Then there is Jack Stapylton and Miss Forsepp, about whom the village tongues are beginning to wag loudly. Every word a fresh torture to poor Linda, who hears it, of course—the gossips take good care of that.

Called at the Priory, and found to my astonishment that Mrs. Morley was gone—no one knew where! A few days ago, she dismissed all the servants (excepting her two faithful followers), with a month's wages in advance, and left Ashford the same day. She has the house for nine months longer, but I cannot find that she held out any prospect of returning. Rent, and all bills paid, to the uttermost farthing. I am surprised at her not leaving a line for me. After all that has passed between us, it would have been natural to do so.

I did not see Ellice to-day. The little maid said, when I called, that Miss Linda was unwell in her room, and Miss Ellice was with her. I then bethought me, having a spare hour, of walking over to the Hall, to have a talk with Jack.

•

A clear frosty day, and woodcocks abundant at Stapylton, so I half expected to hear Jack's gun among the woods; but, contrary to all precedent, I found him sitting gloomily over the fire in his dressing-gown, smoking a clay pipe.

"What's a fellow to do, who's thoroughly miserable, Esdaile? You know all about me and Linda—you're their friend. Well now, see here, Esdaile, you're a sensible fellow, and no humbug about you. I don't mind telling you, I'm in a fix. I'm very fond of her—very fond of her indeed—but——"

"What's the meaning of this flirtation with Miss Forsepp, that all the country talks of?"

"Why, you see, the Governor has done nothing but urge me to think of the girl for ever so long. She was always over here, and I used to teach her billiards, and used to ride out with her; and then Mrs. S. invited her over to Brighton, and there they bothered me about her more than ever. She's a good little thing, but I could never care a button for her, Esdaile. Linda's the only girl for my money."

"Well, what then?" (wondering how he would come to the point). "If this is the case, you

have only to remain faithful, and in time all will come right."

"Aye, but you see Esdaile, this confounded business of poor Vanda's makes it more difficult than before. The old Governor's very ill too, and plagued to death about money. Lost a pot of money this year. Immediately he and the old lady heard of this bad business they seized on it, of course, and said I couldn't go and disgrace the family by marrying a sister of Vanda's. Well, of course, I said, as I've always done before, that I was engaged, and would wait any number of years, but wouldn't break my word. And now here's Linda herself goes and takes their part against me! It's deuced hard—it really is. I shall be a rascal, if I give her up, I know; but if she writes to the Governor and tells him we're no longer engaged, I don't see what I'm to do. He's so much broken within the last two months, Esdaile—and might go off any day—and contradiction, you see, puts him into such a ——"

Jack supplied the substantive by an energetic puff at his pipe. Then he slowly drew from his pocket a letter, and handed it to me.

“Look here. Read that.”

I opened the letter without reply.

“Dearest Jack,—I must call you so once more, and for the last time! I hope you were not hurt at my refusing to see you the other day, when you called. Indeed I know it was better not, for your kindness might have made me forget what my judgment has decided to be best for us both. We must give up all idea of marrying, dear Jack. I think I know your heart: and though I have heard it said you liked some one else, I never believed that you were not true; and that has kept me up until lately. We have had a heavy blow, Jack, of which I cannot speak. The barriers between us are raised fourfold, in consequence. Not that I believe it would affect *your* conduct towards me, but Mrs. Stapylton would never receive me as your wife ought to be received. It would lead to differences between you and your family, of which I will not be the cause. As to the question of money, I could disregard that. I am almost penniless: but I should not have been an extravagant wife, and my love, perhaps, would have made your home

happier than greater luxury. But the question of honor and respect, dear Jack, I ought not to and *will* not disregard, for your sake. So, dear Jack, any sort of engagement that existed between us, you must consider at an end. You will know how much it costs me to say this, and that I have not brought myself to do so without reflecting long over it. Do not try and see me just yet: indeed it is better not, until we can meet calmly as old friends. We shall always remain so, shan't we? and I shall always pray for your happiness, dear Jack.

“I write by this post to your father, to inform him that you are entirely free. God bless you.

“Your constant friend and well-wisher,

“LINDA MONTACUTE.”

There was something so touching in the girl's noble self-sacrifice, in releasing her lover from what she believed now to be a degrading marriage for him, that I remained lost in saddening reflections for some minutes after I had read and refolded the letter.

You are not worthy of that little jewel, in

my humble opinion, Jack. Not a bit worse than three-fourths of the young gentlemen who are popular in all the social relations of life: frank, easy-going, generous; only you have not the dauntless energy, the iron force of *will* that overcomes all obstacles in this life.

When I spoke it was not to *say* this, but to ask what he intended doing?

“Don’t know, Esdaile: can’t tell, for the life of me. The Governor’s let me come back here for a few days, as the little Forsepp is returned home, and the old party invited me to make my head-quarters there, while my people are absent. So the Governor was pleased when I proposed coming home for a few days, and urged my accepting the invitation to Forsepp’s; but I’m not going—not I! And so, if Linda won’t see me, I don’t see much use in my staying here—only I know, since her letter, that Mrs. S. and the Governor will be at me worse than ever.”

“Have you written to Linda?”

“I’ve begun two letters and torn them up. You see the worst of it is, I don’t know what to say to her, Esdaile. I can’t say they

would receive her, because I know they wouldn't; and I believe it'd break the Governor's heart if I were to marry her to-morrow. Besides, I can't live on nothing, of course: and the money market's so deuced tight, between you and me, that I don't see how the Governor *could* make us an allowance, even if he would."

"But why not let matters be as they were before this melancholy affair? You are both young, and can surely wait."

"Well, but there's the money, my good fellow. Debts won't wait. They grow, on the contrary; and the Governor is always pointing out how comfortably the little Forsepp's eighty thousand pounds would cover everything. *I* don't know what to do," said Jack, dolorously, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"You will marry her eighty thousand pounds, I suppose."

Jack shook his head.

"Then write to Linda at once—and write to your father also. Say that you hold yourself more bound to her than ever, since mis-

fortunes have overtaken her, and that though you may be unable to claim her hand for years, nothing shall tempt you to be untrue to her. But, Jack, if you have not confidence in your own strength, you will spare her much future misery by candidly confessing that, circumstanced as you are, you feel with her that it is best your engagement should be cancelled."

"What can I say about my mother, Esdaile?"

"Say nothing. Only tell her you are confident that things will come round, sooner or later. It will take very little to re-assure her. Don't you see that she only wants that? Women are so brave and hopeful—far more so than we are, Jack, in reality; like the tender little blossoms that weather a storm, while the oaks are split and uprooted. Only promise me," and I laid my hand on his shoulder, "that if you *do* renew this chain, you will no longer flutter round the flame of old Forsepp's bank-notes—they'll burn your fingers—and it isn't right towards that little girl, to play this sort of game."

"I declare to you I'll cut the concern at

once. I'll write to old Forsepp to-night; and if Linda won't see me to-morrow, I'll return to Brighton. I won't make any promises to the Governor. I can't say more than that, you see Esdaile, because of the state he's in. Good bye, old fellow, and thank you. You've done me good. And, I say, if Linda thinks it right not to see me, you tell her what I've said, Esdaile."

On my return after this conversation, the resolution I came to yesterday grows more distinct and imperative to me. Feeling as I do towards Ellice, it seems now a duty to open my heart to her at once, since others stand aloof.

January 21st.—I think I am the happiest man in the world this evening!

My Ellice, from her own trembling lips, has confessed she would sooner share my poverty than the wealth of any other man.

When I first pleaded my cause in such words as I could command, and spoke of my own unworthiness, she burst into tears.

"Herbert,—Mr. Esdaile, do not talk thus. Who in the world is there I can ever love and

honor as I do you? You have been everything to us in all our sorrows;—but long before that I knew you were the only person who could ever really obtain an influence over me. I did not think you cared for me,—I kept the secret carefully in my heart. As to poverty, Herbert, I am a poor man's daughter. Are you afraid that I cannot make a poor man's wife?"

How the afternoon sped! And how happy it made me to see the pale flush on the cheek of my beloved once more. We had much to talk over—less of the sad past than of our placid future. Linda, with an instinct perhaps of the nature of our long interview, remained in her own room; and the winter twilight surprised me still sitting there on the sofa beside her.

Our engagement is, of course, kept a secret for the present. So soon after her sister's death it would be impossible to announce it: and this is the only drawback to my present happiness. For the next two months my visits to Sunny Cove must be regulated with a due regard to that hard task-master—"the world"—and we cannot be married till May.

January 25th.—I received a letter from Mrs.

Morley this morning, which most satisfactorily accounts for her sudden disappearance !

I append the letter to my diary, as the sequel to that strange history I have written down elsewhere.

“ SOUTHAMPTON, *Monday, 24th.*

“ MY DEAR MR. ESDAILE,

“ You will be surprised, on your return, to find that I have left Ashford. The *cause* was most unexpected ; but I am sure your kind heart will rejoice when you learn it. A letter from my most noble and generous husband informed me that he had accepted a very high appointment abroad, ‘ Principally with a view,’ he wrote, ‘ of inducing you to accompany me. ‘ There you may forget the past, and begin a ‘ new life, with new faces round you. During ‘ the eighteen months that have elapsed since ‘ we parted, I have had time for deep reflection ‘ and the examination of my own heart. I cannot help feeling that, if you were led astray ‘ by folly and excitement, I was greatly culpable in leaving you so much alone, and in allowing that post which a husband should never ‘ cede, to be occupied by others. Nothing can

‘excuse this neglect: I acknowledge it with shame. Let us then mutually forgive and begin our married life afresh.’ Loving him as I have always done, and more, far more than ever, since I was separated from him, I could respond to his appeal fervently and gratefully. I left Ashford the next day, and joined my husband in London. And now I believe in my heart we are reunited never to be parted, but by death. We sail to-morrow morning. Perhaps, my dear Mr. Esdaile, you and I may never meet again in this world, not for some years at all events; but I shall always retain a grateful sense of your kindness. I know I can trust you with my secret, which, indeed, is no longer mine, but *his*. The facts, however, if they can serve ‘to point a moral,’ you are at full liberty to mention. They are such as are commoner in women’s lives than perhaps you are aware of!

“I cannot close this without saying how thankfully I read the announcement of that poor girl’s marriage, and *release*. She would never have had a happy life with Bismark; though a true attachment—if he is capable of one—

might have lifted him out of the intense selfishness that belongs to such a character. But the experiment was dangerous; and with that poor girl's temperament, she would probably have been miserable.

"My husband desires me to convey to you his warm acknowledgments for the kind sympathy you showed me when at Ashford.

"Gratefully and sincerely yours,

"CAROLINE ———."

I am most heartily glad at the unexpected good news this letter contains. If more husbands would follow this rare example of magnanimity, how many a broken heart might be healed! how many a desperate course stayed! how many a home where once the fire of love burned dimly, be re-warmed by mutual forgiveness!

Bismark is gone abroad; let us hope, "a sadder and a wiser man."

January 26th.—Mr. Brigstock has just been here to tell me that news was received this morning of the Squire's sudden death at Brighton.

Jack, it appears, left the Hall the morning after I saw him. I am glad his favourite son

was with the Squire when he died. The neighbourhood will regret the jovial old gentleman; the poor especially miss the hearty "good day," and inquiries after their little ailments, that never failed to greet them when the old grey cob came ambling down the road. I fear that anxiety of mind, consequent on his money difficulties, may have hastened his end.

I sometimes look around me, and ask whose position is to be envied? Certainly not Philip's, the representative of an old house, inheriting a noble estate, but with it, difficulties, anxieties, and heavy responsibilities. Not Mr. Forsepp, with all his wealth, and raised by *it* alone into a society above his natural sphere. Not Sir Richard, or any of the great landed gentry about here. Poor as I am, I am thankful to say I have no vain longings after these things. For my Ellice's sake, I could wish the Curate's narrow income admitted of many little comforts from which she will be debarred; but happiness does not consist in these things. Trite as that remark is, it cannot be too often repeated; and my joy is too great, increasing as it does, in her presence every day, for me not to feel

deeply, eternally grateful that I am what I am—poor, but independent, and beloved.

February 5th.—The Stapylton affairs are found to be deeply involved, as was expected. A portion of the property is heavily mortgaged; and the Squire has, moreover, left debts amounting to many thousand pounds. It will require time and management to enable Philip to pay these off, as he, of course intends. Mrs. Stapylton's jointure will be another heavy drag on the estate. She intends residing at Brighton, I understand, though Philip offered her a home at the Hall. She and her eldest son suit too little to live happily together. The younger sons have very little. How about Jack, I wonder? I have not seen him since the funeral, and I hear he is much cut up, poor fellow; but he and Linda had their first interview yesterday.

February 8th.—Philip called on me early this morning.

“Come and take a walk with me, Esdaile. I've been for the last week with those detestable lawyers, shut up with deeds and bills, and I want a breath of air and a talk with you to refresh me.”

“With all my heart. I’m sure you must find a great deal of hard work, and I am glad to see you are setting vigorously about it. I know how distasteful it is to you.”

“Don’t praise me too soon, Esdaile. I’m afraid you’ll find I’m a coward after all. These things *must* be done, for they regard my poor father’s honor. If I cut down every stick on the property, sell the plate, and everything in the house, his debts *must* be paid. After that——”

“Well! After that?”

“Why, I’m thinking seriously, Esdaile, of giving it all up to Jack, who’ll manage it a thousand times better than I should. He and his Linda will live at the Hall and be a capital Squire and Lady Bountiful, and I shall keep a few hundreds a-year and go abroad, which is infinitely more to my taste, you know—and I shall come over occasionally and see them.”

“No, Philip, you’ll do nothing of the kind, if you are the man I take you for. God has placed you in a certain position, and He will call upon you to render up an account of your

stewardship. It won't do to palm off the responsibility on some one else, just because it doesn't suit your tastes."

"But Jack, my dear Esdaile, is so much better calculated for the position than I am. And besides, it will be the means of enabling him to marry at once, which he cannot do now."

"You think that an invincible argument to *me*," I said, smiling, "who am so anxious to see them married: but I say that a thousand times rather would I have them wait for years than that you should abandon your post here, like a coward—as you very justly called yourself, Philip. But besides this, I defeat you upon another ground. It is not true that Jack is in *all* ways more suited to be the head of a large estate than yourself. Granted that he is a good farmer, and that you understand nothing of farming. You can learn. I have seen men with all your disinclination and half your capacity, master these things—and end by liking them, too. Then do you think that Jack will either know or care anything about the mental condition of the poor? As long as they do a

good day's work for him, I'm afraid he will not trouble his head very much more about them. Now these are days when it is no longer a question of choice or opinion about Education. If we don't see that they get it in the right way, they will get it in the wrong. Socialism, Infidelity, every sort of evil follows, if we don't guard and elevate them above this by a better teaching. We have talked over this before, Philip, and you feel as I do. You know the necessity of a wholesome education for the very poorest man, and you may be of infinite use, in this respect, among those who are dependent on you. I do most emphatically repeat, therefore, that the abilities God has given you should be exercised in the sphere where He has placed you, and no other."

"And what's to become of Jack? I might, to be sure, let him have the old Grange, with the farm adjoining it."

"Capital arrangement. He would then be near enough for you to consult him about the property, which will of course be strange to you at first; and yet you will not be so dependent on him as if he were at the Hall."

“But—for some years, Esdaile—until I pay everything off—he will have very little. The Grange farm is not worth five hundred a-year, and Jack’s habits are extravagant.”

“He must get rid of them. Depend on it, Philip, this is a wiser arrangement for Jack’s happiness than encouraging his old habits, by putting him at the head of a large house, where he will have many temptations to expense under the name of ‘hospitality,’ and where he will never cure himself of spending more than he has. By and bye, when your affairs come round, you can be as liberal to him as you like; a little wholesome economy, meantime, will do him no harm.”

“Well,” said Philip, “I’m afraid you’re right, Esdaile,—you generally are. But don’t go and desert me now. You’re not going to get a fat living and cut the Ashford curacy, eh?”

“No chance of that,” I replied with a smile, “my home is here for the present—probably for life.”

LETTER

To the Baroness SCHÖNBOEN, Dresden.

March 15th.

Thanks for your affectionate letter, my dear sister ; and the interest you take in all that concerns me. I knew I should have your hearty congratulations. I knew also that you would declare that you had "seen it all along." It is true I did not confess the state of my own heart to myself till lately, but one of the first lessons you taught me was to believe in the superior penetration of woman !

I sent you that budget from my Diary, because I thought it would explain to you better than any letter *now*, the strange and sad events that have brought about this happy consequence to me. The dear girls have both recovered their health

and good looks, and in some measure their spirits, since I last wrote. Mrs. Stapylton, at the earnest instances of her eldest son, has written to Linda as her future daughter-in-law. The double marriages will take place the same day, early in May. They will of course be strictly private, on every account. Colonel Shaddock has given each of the girls a thousand pounds, and Captain Ellice has sent his god-daughter two hundred for her *trousseau*. She tells me, with a smile, it is to be one quite after the fashion of *your* country, consisting principally of sheets and table-linen!

As an advantageous purchaser has offered for Sunny Cove, it has been thought best to sell it, the proceeds being divided between Ellice and Linda. Our future home is to be the small white cottage clustered over with roses and woodbine, in which Humboldt Ferrers lived last summer, before he went to America. It has since been untenanted. Probably on that account,—though the owner assures me for my own deserts,—I am to have it at a very low rent, and you will see how pretty Ellice will make it, with her taste for arrangement. This future tense means something more than a conventional ex-

pression of confidence. Though the cottage is very small, there will always be a corner for you both—pipe and baby included; and I look forward with delight to making you and my beloved Ellice something more than sisters in *name*.

Philip has given Jack the Grange and adjoining farm (which forms no part of the original estate, but was bought by his grandfather, and is not entailed). Jack has already begun his new life by sending all his horses up to Tattersal's except one hunter and a hack. The Squire's stud was sold there last week. The family plate, and—what is a greater grief to Philip—the library, have also been brought to the hammer. Nothing convertible into money has been spared, and the proceeds will only just cover the Squire's debts. The greater portion of the Hall is shut up; two servants only are left. Philip lives in his tower, and is, I hope, setting himself energetically to work on the right road. When he is not closeted with the land steward, he is walking over the farms with his brother; and he assures me, he is becoming learned on the subjects of sub-

soiling and drainage. To disentangle the skein of difficulties in which he found himself, on his father's death, requires time and courage. He has still enough to do: no leisure for German Philosophy,—not one mystical reverie, I can answer for it, these two months past.

“We are all three setting up in life as poor men,” said he, with a smile, yesterday; “but you and Jack have an unfair advantage over me. Where I was bankrupt long ago, you start with a large capital, and you will not waste it, either, Esdaile, if I understand you and Ellice aright.”

FINIS.

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